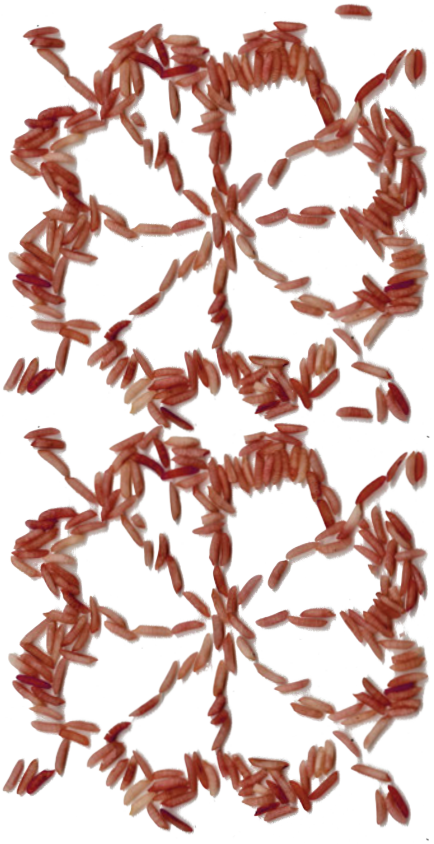
dēsigned

ISSUE 4

২০২৬

2026

২_০২_৩৩



desi-gned 2026 Issue 4

Providence, RI 02903-02912
United States of America

dēsigned

New England's first publication
for the South Asian diaspora

desi is derived from the Sanskrit word "*deśá*," meaning, 'land or country' and hence, *desi* means 'of the homeland.'

desi is a self-appellation—an ethnonym used by people of the Indian subcontinent and its diaspora to describe their cultures, identities, and shared histories.

desi is widely used across South Asia, comprising Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

dēsi

desi transcends single nationalities, languages, or religions. It evokes a deep connection to the motherland—rooted in age-old traditions shaped by centuries of migration, cohabitation, and innovation. In attempting to retell this diverse, largely oral and local history, much has been distorted and homogenized, forgotten and lost. If South Asia is an anthology of human tales, then a majority of its tales have been unwritten.

As creatives navigating the complexities of being South Asian, we face a crisis of authenticity—one that calls for humility and a plurality of voices to confront the fractures of our globalized present. In bringing our stories into spaces marked by erasure, appropriation, and asymmetries of power, we center native terminology to reclaim silenced histories, revive print archives as vessels of human memory, and subvert academic norms to create more equitable ways of knowing.

desi-gned is our compilation of living archives—of ingenious craftsmanship, subaltern histories, and current contemplations—of untold *desi* stories that need to be shared.

desi-gned's motif is a marriage of the traditions of *kolam* (floor murals made using rice powder) from the South and *jali* (Arabic-inspired stone curtains that are carved into arches and windows) from the North—the two most dominant aesthetic cultures from South Asia that comprise a multitude of sub-cultures and identities.

Here, it is reimagined in rice by our cover artist, Ankita Bhat.

This month, with more power than usual, there are two halves of me. From Amma, I learn ritual, rice, resolve—the beauty in repetition, the beauty in setting intentions, the beauty in sharing. From Dada, I learn to translate them—into Hindi, into abstraction, into post-rationalised thought.

Rice is looking at me as I sit on the stool in the kitchen in Coonoor.
Rice is soaking in a bowl of water, waiting to be ground into batter.
Rice is steaming in a steel tumbler, into kudubu, into idlis.
Rice is spread onto the tava, goopy until crispy, a dosa.
Rice is weighing on us, as it is carried from back to back, until it reaches mine.
Rice's yellows, browns, blues, and greens.
Rice is telling me to draw on my doorstep.

I talk about rice as a verb, because she has always been happening to me. The visual language that rice has given me has been inherited fromeveryday labours; we both remember the ellipses she asks for my hand to make, from watching other hands handle rice in similar ways. Painting with rice is a dance with all the places and beings who brought rice to me, and now to you.

Ankita Bhat (b. 2003) is a Singaporean-Indian interdisciplinary designer whose work learns from the methodologies of rice as an animate intelligence. Drawing from motifs and rituals from her matrilineage, she invites us to slow down, and share a private, peaceful experience with her through her objects. She investigates her inherited knowledge and biases through creative writing, and hopes to offer a decolonial lens of working through material storytelling.

Currently, Ankita is working towards a BFA in Furniture Design at the Rhode Island School of Design.

This publication was created within the colonial structures of *Brown University* and *Rhode Island School of Design* — institutions that are located on the ancestral and contemporary homelands of the *Narragansett, Wampanoag* and *Nipmuc* Nations. In studying and thinking about art and design in English and within a dominant Western European academic tradition, we legitimize a global colonial power structure. These institutions and industries are responsible for many injustices, both past and ongoing, which include slavery and race prejudice.

We are committed to work together to honor this past and build a future that champions greater acknowledgment, accessibility, and inclusivity towards peoples and perspectives from all cultures, backgrounds, and traditions.

This issue of desi-gned has been supported by the Division of Social Equity & Inclusion's Innovation Fund. Our co-sponsors include:

FLEET LIBRARY

SEI

A&L
Center for Arts & Language

RISD ARCHITECTURE + DESIGN

RISD ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT & PROVOST'S OFFICE

Editors-in-Chief

Hrishita Acharya
RISD 2026
Industrial Design

Harsh Thakkar
RISD 2027
Architecture

Design Director

Chahak Surana
RISD 2026
Graphic Design

Founding Editor

Yukti V. Agarwal
Brown | RISD 2024.5

Founding Designer

Mehek Gopi Vohra
Brown | RISD 2024

Designers

Shlok Dey
RISD 2028
Graphic Design

Pallavi Mallik
RISD 2029
Graphic Design

Nayyab Naveed
RISD 2026
Illustration

Editors

Areeha Ahmad
RISD 2025
Global Arts and Culture

Tishika Deora
RISD 2026
Industrial Design

Tanvi Mittal
RISD 2027
Industrial Design

Kinjalk Neupane
RISD 2027
Interior Architecture

Dhruvi Shah
RISD 2026
Interior Architecture

Further contributions by
Ruhi Parakh (RISD 2029)

Special thanks to Jennifer Liese for the innumerable hours of her time advising us on design and publishing.

Editors' Note

Our everyday lives are filled with chaos: there is a call and response, an improvisational rhythm that we fall into as we 'do' life. The diversity in response makes our shared existence complex and compelling, but there is a momentum that keeps us rumbling along. This is the everyday: the mundane, the quotidian, the habitual, the ordinary.

This year, our writers held up a magnifying glass against this everydayness, taking the ordinary and expanding it to feel extraordinary. They dove deep into the common-places, the banal objects and the collective habits that make them, and found treasure troves of stories. We thought it was striking that they were all grounded in material culture, engaging with sensorial and lived experiences. With this, we came to our theme: *everyday materiality*.

Materiality has its origins in the Latin *materia*, meaning wood or timber, a historically ubiquitous construction material. It has since evolved to mean that which is made of matter, that which is solid, and that which is worthy of being recorded. Today, unprecedented technological advancement pervades our routines, yet it cannot surpass traditional forms of knowledge-making. In this world of dwindling materiality, looking closer at what remains allows us to reckon with how we got here.

This issue looks at three ways of engaging with such everyday materiality: *seeing, being* and *doing*. *Seeing* is about identification: how you relate to what you see and hear. *Being* is about immersion: the experience of being in a space. *Doing* is about action: driving something ahead.

Within this cacophony of seeing, being, and doing—a conscious performance—we interact with objects; we smell, we touch, we hear, and we breathe all that surrounds us. As you move through this issue, you'll be faced with different kinds of sensory encounters: the ruffle of newspaper pages to the jingles of iconic ads; the sweet scent of the mulberry tree in the summer to the tantalising, smoky richness of a *bhutta*; the hands coloured with bright red *alta* to the hands raised up along bright stars to find your place.

Everyday life is a way of being, noticing things, and responding to it. It is a habitual practice of deriving fruition to your thoughts. We invite you to let those thoughts wander, to pay attention to the view out your window and find something new every time you look.

Hrishita Acharya

Harsh Thakkar

Editors' Note 8

Seeing

The Hamzanama: Miniatures Through the Ages 14
Inayah Mirza

Before the Billboard 22
Dhruvi Shah

Inherited Identities 26
Shreyasi Jindal

Being

Look at all the trees, look how they're defending the universe 32
Nayyab Naveed

Home 38
Mehak Ailani

A tree that remembers... 40
Areeha Ahmad

Mai To Raste Se Ja Raha Tha 48
Harsh Thakkar

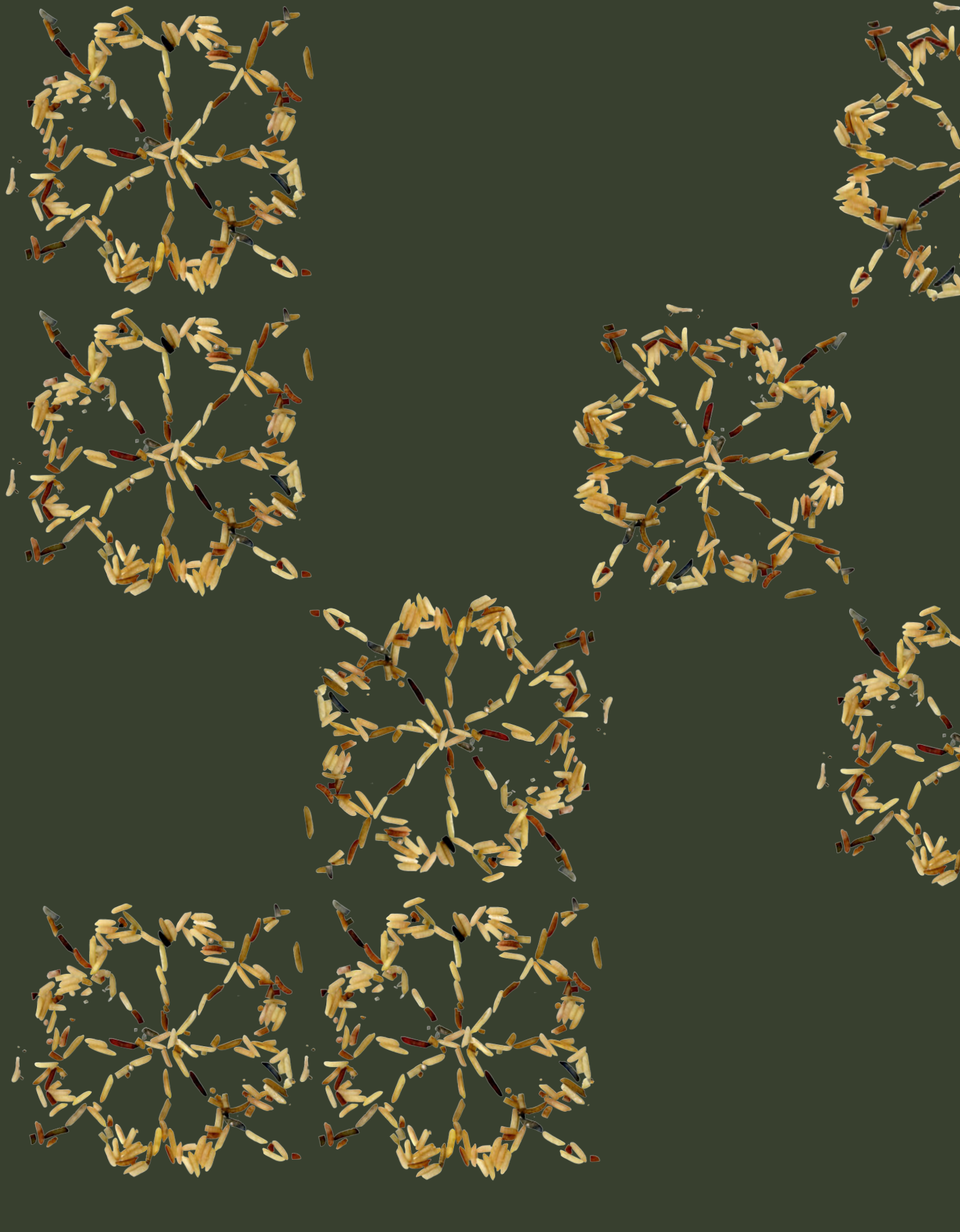
Doing

Performing Femininity 58
Ananya Uddanti

Turtles All the Way Down 64
Tanmayee More

Collecting and Being Collected 74
Yukti V. Agarwal

Glossary 82

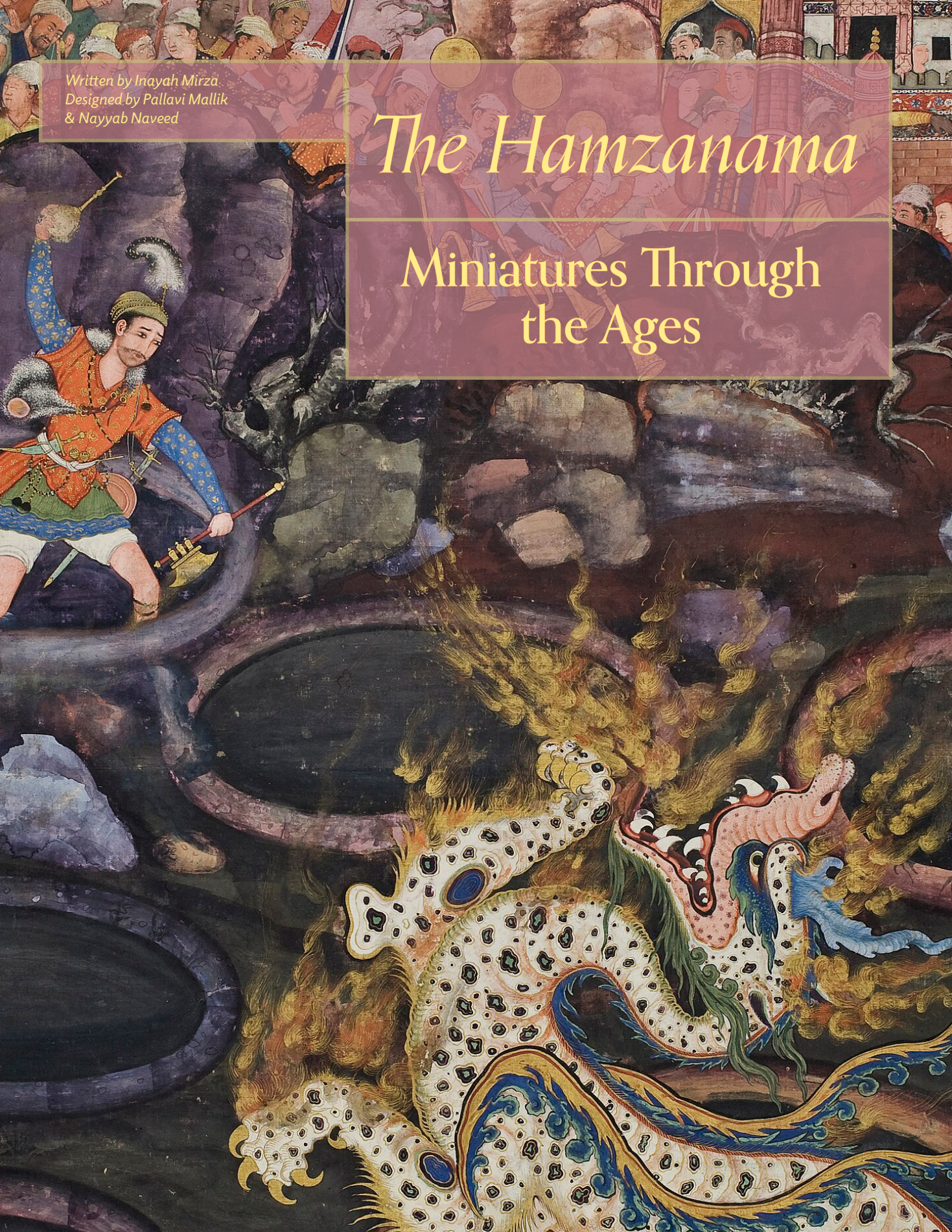


Seeing

Written by Inayah Mirza
Designed by Pallavi Mallik
& Nayyab Naveed

The Hamzanama

Miniatures Through the Ages

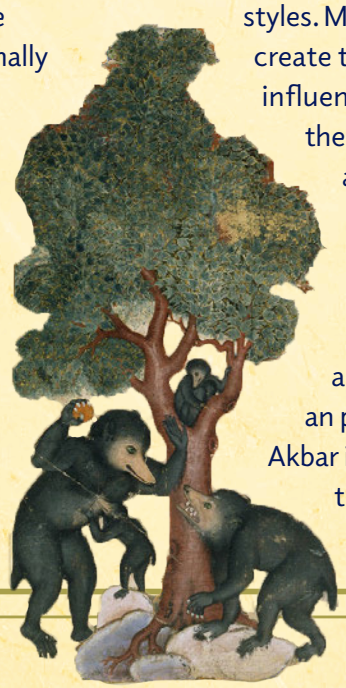


Many cultures around the world have their own forms of miniature paintings: small, intricate artworks that tell vibrant stories in a single frame. In Persia, the Mongols' invasion brought Chinese papermaking and styles, which spurred the production of miniature paintings from the 13th to the 16th centuries. Due to the resources and craftsmanship required to make miniatures, the art form was found in the highest courts of Persian emperors. Often, the making of the works demanded perfection and reflected spiritual practice, so entire schools and hierarchies were created for the art. The Persians' high regard for arts and literature, largely influenced by the Islamic emphasis on reading, made the ability of miniature paintings to communicate integral cultural stories and tales especially appealing in Persia. Therefore, miniature paintings in Persia almost always accompanied written text; their size, 5 to 15 cm, needed to be small enough to hold in a book. Over in India, the Persian style of miniature painting flourished mainly under the Mughal dynasty in the 16th century, when Islamic emperors introduced it to India's artistic canon. Miniature paintings in India took on their own style while continuing to tell stories, showing more interest in court paintings and larger works than before. Sometimes the art stood on its own without writing. Despite its focus on Persian and Indian styles, the Hamzanama is a product of the global history of miniature and influences all subsequent work. When examining the history of miniatures and how different cultures have intersected to complicate and enrich their creation and legacy, the Hamzanama Miniatures serve as a case study. As one of the world's most famous and complex miniature series. The work blends culture, religion, and fantasy.

Commissioned by the Mughal Emperor Akbar in 1562, the project spanned 15 years and had two artistic directors; Mir Sayyid Ali and Abd al-Samad. Despite its label as a "miniature", most of the watercolour paintings in the series are an impressive 20 by 27 inches. The 1400 painting project follows the narrative of the uncle of Prophet Muhammad, Hamza bin Abdul Muttalib, fictionalised into the hero "Amir Hamza".

When discussing the Hamzanama miniatures, it's crucial to recognise the story's wide range of religious and cultural origins. The Hamzanama is a very religiously based text, Islamically inspired but described as narratively Greek: the "Iliad and Odyssey of the East" for its popularity and tropes. Told in dramatic performances and retellings, the protagonist, Hamza, is "the chosen one" through prophecy, destined to live an eventful life. Throughout the story, he undertakes numerous episodic quests, full of foes and loves. The most interesting aspects are the different characters and their artistic portrayal. The creatures in the tales are widely sourced: there are djinn from Islamic texts, Chinese-style dragons, *Divs* or ogres from Zoroastrianism, and the Rukh bird from *101 Nights*. The characters are diverse in inspiration, with brown people in the crowds wearing traditionally Indian garments unique to Mughal miniatures, and Jewish and Chinese people represented in the travels. The Hamzanama story, and the miniatures by proxy, have a temporal synthesis as well, its oral nature allowing add-ons to the narrative as the story spreads. The Hamzanama is much more sprawling and dynamic in its storytelling than famous Western literature, and the style of the miniatures captures that fullness. It borrows from different styles artistically to tell a religiously diverse story.

Understood as an oral folk tale passed down through the centuries, the Hamzanama miniatures honour its roots by employing traditionally trained artistic directors. The paintings are also accompanied by narratives in the Persian script, along with geometric borders. Famous for their extremely detailed landscapes, stylised people and nature, and flat perspective, Persian miniature paintings were at their golden age in the Safavid Empire in the 1500's. However, the Hamzanama miniatures production team, comprising over 100 artists, included many local Indian painters with their own miniature traditions. Brighter colours, dynamism, and more realistic perspectives, along with more naturalistic fauna and flora, began to emerge from the crossing of styles. Miniature painters in Persia often create their own landscapes and foliage, influenced by their home country, but in the Hamzanama, there are many Indian flora and architectural elements, demonstrating the crossover and influence of location on artistic traditions. Thus, the Hamzanama miniatures are a rare study into a distinct mix of Persian and Indian painting styles. After its creation, Akbar invited more European artists into the court, which changed miniature painting dramatically.



عمل پادشاه

گفتای مرغان منم بی‌یار و بی‌سیج و پر
هم مرید حضرت و پیک سپهر
هم از آن حضرت خبر دارا آمدم
هم ز مملکت صاحب‌سپر آمدم

In conversations about Mughal painting, the Hamzanama miniatures are always cited as the start of Indian and Persian artistic synthesis, but it's still hard to find resources that analyse the specific exchanges with visual evidence. Many miniature artists remained anonymous, making their backgrounds in painting difficult to trace. Whether an artist was Indian or Persian could come down to specific understandings of brushes or pigment, and even then, it's hard to identify. Indian and Persian miniature paintings are also very similar due to shared artistic influences prior to the Mughal period. Many of the artistic exchanges mentioned during the Mughal period have their roots in the Delhi Sultanate period of India's history. Make no mistake, the Mughal miniature painting era saw a sharp increase in artistic skill, detail, and production of these works, but to claim the Mughal empire as the origin of synthesis is unfounded.

What is a Miniature?

When you think of a miniature painting, your mind may travel to the modern-day microscopic marvels: paintings inside needles, so small the human eye isn't even able to perceive them. However, in the Middle Ages, miniature paintings meant something very different. The term "miniature" originally comes from the Latin *minium* or *red lead*. The words *miniare* and later *miniatura* were intended to refer to the first decorative letter at the beginning of a page of a manuscript. Slowly, the word came to mean any kind of "illuminating" or illustrative work in manuscripts, and then any type of small painting by the 16th century. The Hamzanama miniatures were made around 1562, after the rise of the word "miniature," meaning a small painting. However, Persian miniature paintings began to be created around the 13th century, inspired by Chinese artwork and influenced by Mongol culture. Although, it seems that Persian miniature paintings must have only started to be called so when the word miniature meant small, not "red". There's no way medieval manuscripts and Persian miniatures didn't intersect before the 16th century. That's a whole 300 years of no artistic exchange. So what were they called before that?

While it's hard to pin down exactly, it's likely that Persian works shifted from being called "illuminated manuscripts" to "miniatures," as Western art did. The Mughal works got their name after the transition to the miniature form, meaning "small". Ironically, the only ones that were actually small were Persian (5 to 15 cm). While Persian works may have originated in the tradition of illuminated manuscripts, they developed into a unique art form on their own. Mughal works are more inspired by developed Persian works than by illuminated manuscripts. Indian miniatures, often graphically stylised and executed on small palm leaves, originated in the 8th century and continued into Mughal India. Calling all of these works "miniatures" is not only confusing, since half of them are rather large, but also complicates the line of inspiration and the groundwork.

Now that we've discussed the Western taxonomy of Miniature paintings, what are they actually called? For Persian miniatures, the answer is a *Negārgari-ye Irâni*, or *Negargari*, translating from Arabic to mean "Iranian small painting". Locally, Mughal miniature paintings were called *musawwari*, a Persian term for the painting style.

Another difficulty is determining where the artistic styles India incorporated into the miniatures originated. Returning to taxonomy and timeline, India had a rich history of paintings dubbed "miniatures" before the classic Persian style was created. The Jain artistic era is likely the root of the brighter colours in many Indian and Persian miniatures. India, despite bearing its own artistic traditions, is frequently portrayed as a passive recipient of Persian and Western culture in academic discourse that compare the two without including India. Of course, some influences are more difficult to track than others; part of the reason information is scarce is the destruction and disappearance of many art records from the region, but that doesn't exclude the need for a more comprehensive monitoring of artistic trends in non-Western contexts. There is a clear understanding of Western art historical developments from Greece to Rome to the Renaissance; the same care should be afforded to amazingly complex projects like the Hamzanama miniatures.

In discussing the broader origin story, artistic traditions, and narrative diversity, where does it leave us with the Hamzanama miniatures? While the call for broader study and accuracy is well-founded, the truth is that only 200 of the original 1400 images from the project remain. Amid numerous Afghan invasions and a weakened Mughal empire, the Sack of Delhi in 1757 destroyed many records, when the original images were removed from the library. Their materials are also a liability; paper is fragile and easily damaged without proper care. Consolidated research is also hindered by the fact that most of the miniatures are spread across the world between

New York, Washington D.C., and London. There's no source where all the images are together or in order. With the new surge of de-centering Eurocentric ideas and terminology in art history, revisiting the Hamzanama miniatures should be next on the list. Many works from the 14th to 17th centuries were overtaken and compared to the Renaissance, the pinnacle of human achievement. More legible work like individual based artistic realism, a mainly western practice, is preferred in comparison to work where every detail is from a different culture or person. There is way more content and accessibility to Western works than to much more engaging works from the East.

Despite widespread attention, modern recognition of miniature paintings attests to their impact and ongoing evolution. Pakistani artists Aisha Khalid and Imran Qureshi have both led a neo-miniature movement, inspired by the marksmanship of miniatures and their literary roots; they twist what a miniature painting can and should be. Aisha Khalid explores the role of South Asian women in craft, using fabric and simple miniature motifs to convey femininity and contemporary issues. Qureshi splashes red paint over his work as a commentary on breaking perfection and trying to grow. Instead of intricacy, Khalid and Qureshi make the core of their miniature paintings accessible, allowing for mistakes and a lack of control. Their work has gone global for their innovation and passion for world issues, where previous miniatures wanted to engrave the past, they imagined a future. It's important to revisit the past so we can better understand the future that we are trying to make: the values and voices we carry forward. Much of that effort comes from everyday people, so I ask: what new connections can we make?

BEFORE THE BILLBOARD

WRITTEN BY DHRUVI SHAH

A History of Advertising in India

DESIGNED BY CHAHAK SURANA

For years, the Indian subcontinent has witnessed continuous shifts, from colonial rule to independence, from wars to nationwide celebrations, and from famines to pandemics. Each of these moments reshaped the social climate of the country, influencing how people thought, hoped, and feared.

Advertising has always responded to these emotional undercurrents. When we think of advertisements, we think of brands, jingles, Bollywood stars, dance, drama, and spectacle: the entire machinery of persuasion. Promotions on phones and televisions for Gen Z function much like billboards did for boomers, and newspaper and magazine notices did for those born before independence. Hence, the story of advertising in India does not begin with agencies or television commercials, but with newspapers.

Long before the emergence of organised advertising firms, newspapers were already shaping public opinion, influencing public ideas, and learning how to speak to a variety of audiences. In colonial India, printed media became the earliest, fastest, and easiest medium through which information, commerce, and politics were exchanged. What started off as small notices about ship arrivals from England went on to voice public opinion and reflected aspiration and resistance.

In Bengal, the literary pivot of India, the foundations of modern media were quietly being built within newspaper pages. It is necessary to return to this early moment in the history of print culture to understand the influence of advertising in South Asia today.

BENGAL GAZETTE, 1780

The first 'English-language' newspaper, started by an Irishman, James Augustus Hicky, called itself a '..Political and commercial paper, open to all (except the British). Started in parties but influenced by none' Bengal and inaccessible to the majority of the local population, the gazette notified the wealthy about the arrivals of ships from Britain and news from around the colony. The newspaper went on to publish several anti-colonial articles, ridiculed the East India Company, and even spoke about tabooed topics like menstruation. However, within two years of its circulation, the last copy of the Gazette was published in March, 1782 before being compelled to shut down by the British Raj.

Samachar Darpan, 1814

The need for a publication in the local language in Bengal was addressed by the Baptist Missionary Society at Serampore, Calcutta, when they launched the Dig Darpan, later called the Samachar Darpan. Since the purpose of the publication was to stay afloat in the colonial community, they avoided any political controversies and served as a mere source of information, aiding conversions to Christianity. Their loyalty to the Raj revealed itself when they published critical writings against the Swadeshi movement and social reformers like Ram Mohan Roy. It went on to become one of the most circulated Indian-language newspapers around 1836, before it was discontinued when they 'failed their primitive objective: propagation of Christianity.'

সমাচার দর্পণ

Mangal Pandey

Mangal Pandey fired at Lieutenant Baugh, the Adjutant, and wounded his horse. Baugh fired his pistol at him but missed, and the Sepoy, drawing his sword, cut him down.

Hindoo Patriot, 1853

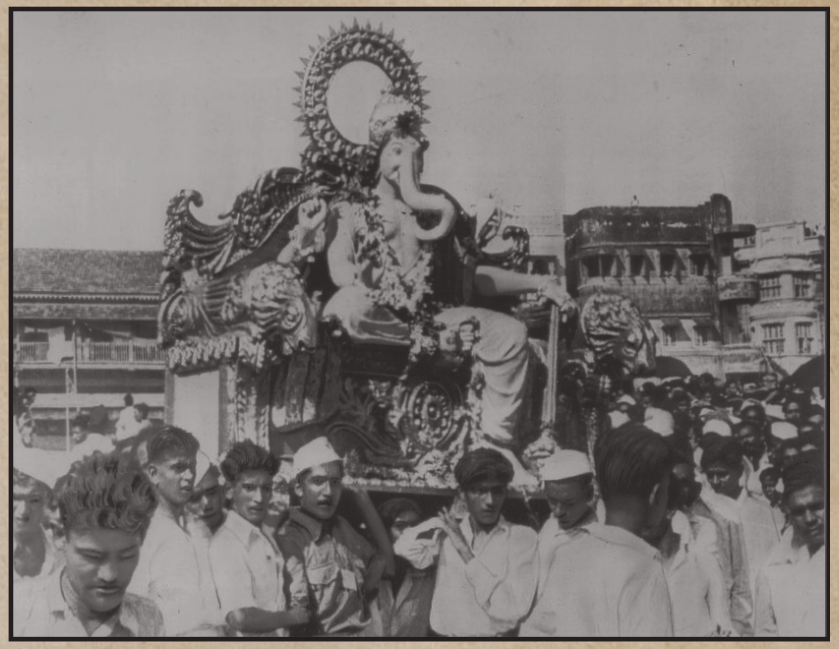
Established in 1853 in Kolkata, the Hindoo Patriot replaced the Bengal Recorder and was published every Thursday with Harish Chandra Mukherjee as the chief editor. During the Revolt of 1857, following Mangal Pandey's attack on British officers in Barrackpore, about 21 kilometres north of present-day Kolkata, the Hindoo Patriot emerged as a mouthpiece for public protest. The newspaper initially expressed conflicting views about the battle and only later came to recognise the contributions and martyrdom of leaders such as Tatya Tope, Rani Laxmi Bai, and Kunwar Singh. During the Indigo Rebellion around 1859, they explicitly helped expose the atrocities of the Indian peasants and urged them to go on strikes and not grow indigo on their farmlands, thus eventually suppressing the colonial force. The newspaper also promoted progressive social clauses like women's education and the Hindu Widow Remarriage Act. The Hindoo Patriot was largely influential in imbuing patriotism and became the voice of the public.

Amrita Bazar Patrika, 1877

Known for its fierce criticism of the British colonial policies, the Amrita Bazar Patrika was one of the primary reasons why the Vernacular Press Act was passed in 1878. It was an effort by the colony to prevent anti-national journalism in local-language newspapers across the subcontinent. To escape this law, the Patrika transitioned into an English language newspaper, continuing to pioneer decolonial content, gaining public support which the government wished to suppress.

Kesari, 1881

This Marathi newspaper, Kesari, started in Pune by Bal Gangadhar Tilak, was one of the first and most influential weekly publications on the Western side of India, with the specific purpose of advocating Swaraj and Swadeshi movements. This publication was also used to spread patriotism and a shared national culture through popularising the celebration of Ganeshotsav in the region. Tilak was imprisoned multiple times during this period on account of the powerful and ruthless critique of the Raj. Most advertisements in this publication focused on Indian handicrafts and the promotion of national education.



Bombay Samachar, 1920

The Bombay Samachar was a Gujarati-language newspaper native to Western India, famously known for promoting local swadeshi brands with the use of observational comedy representative of a common man in Mumbai. An improvement in printing techniques and the use of wood-carved stamps presented an opportunity for illustration and creativity in advertisements.

The advertisement about real estate issues in 1925 and offers on railway tickets around 1937 use a similar tone as they identify lifestyle issues in all communities and craft a dream of a better life with the help of the brand.

Poor and inconvenient conditions of living had been assigned or forced upon the locals, and they were tired and restless. The feeling of aspiration, of freedom, and of a comfortable life that these advertisements tried tapping into worked in their favour.

With the infamous Leela Chitnins as their poster girl, Lux became the connoisseur of the concept of brand endorsements with public figures, making Leela the first female to be featured. This, in turn, started the trend of false beauty standards, and the concept of a perfect fair skinned 'modern looking' woman became aspirational to everyone. Not only her attire, but also the products like lipsticks, creams and oils replaced her traditionally used home remedies as an act of modernity, freedom, and autonomy.

મુંબઈ સમાચાર.

THE BOMBAY SAMACHAR.

Advertising campaigns tap into the collective sentiment of their time, translating public anxieties, aspirations, and humour into visual and textual messages. When we step back and observe this media as a timeline rather than isolated publications, they begin to function as cultural artefacts of history, revealing what people desired and the India they were dreaming about.

A 'Dimond biscuit' jingle remembered from childhood, a witty 'Amul' billboard on a highway, or Amitabh Bachchan advertising Cadbury on a newspaper front page often carries within it traces of a particular social climate influenced by a moment that occurred somewhere in India. The language of advertising shifts alongside the nation itself: from colonial persuasion, to nationalist pride, and to confident consumer-driven voices in modern India, truly reflecting the 'Taste of India.'

Written by Shreyasi Jindal *Designed by Chahak Surana*

INHERITED IDENTITIES

For more than a century, advertisements sold more than just products. Under colonial rule, they sold an idea of modernity as something that was granted to India, giving Indians the opportunity to catch up and prove their worthiness by complying with the ideologies propagated by the British. English ads for the English-speaking elite—European lithography wrapped around soap, tea, cigarettes, and calendars—blended imperial symbols with figures of gods, all appealing to British ideas of modernity and of India as inferior. However, with the end of colonial rule, we saw a shift not only in public consciousness but also in the advertisements and content they consumed. The images that once spoke for them now talked to them. This transfer of power led to a rise in nationalist messages, a sense of patriotism fostered by the Swadeshi movement. It encouraged Indians to use indigenous products and become self-reliant, showing progress in a proudly vernacular way.

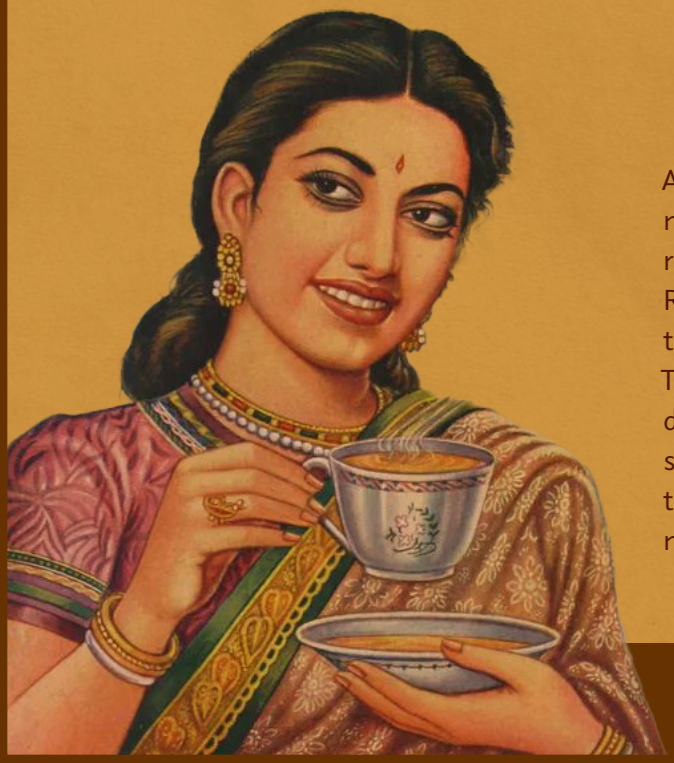
Chai patti in boiling water, crushed adrak, split elaichi, milk rising to the brim of the pan.

Ek cup chai?

A question that resonates in homes, railway platforms, and college canteens. The smell of the chai patti, adrak, and elaichi warms one even before tasting it. However, this comfort and taste, now so familiar, have meanings shaped by advertisements

"YOU CAN TELL THE IDEALS OF A NATION BY ITS ADVERTISEMENTS." — GEORGE NORMAN DOUGLAS

that projected ideas of sociability and "good taste" onto Indian life. In a Lipton's Tea advertisement from 1935, an elegant white English woman is served tea by a dark-skinned plantation worker. The image appears cordial but reveals the idea of refinement associated with the British, while the labourers remain silent in the background, only to produce for and serve their superiors. Soon, a deliberate shift was observed in the visual grammar, replacing the English woman with an urban Indian elite woman. Still, the pain and labour of the women in the plantations remained masked, an example of the orientalist visual practices that showed women as producers and consumers, but never as equals. As India gained independence, advertisements declared: 'Tea is 100% Swadeshi.' No British in sight. No civilising gaze. Tea became a way for Indians to reclaim their sense of citizenship and cultural pride.



The tea brand Wagh Bakri was founded in 1934 by Narandas Desai. After facing racial discrimination in South Africa, he sought to inspire an idea that positioned all as equals and founded the Gujarat Tea Depot in 1919. In 1934, he gave the brand its name and its now-iconic logo – a tiger (wagh) and a goat (bakri), an unlikely and unequal duo drinking from the same cup. While created under colonial rule, it sparked the idea of unity and swadeshi self-reliance.

After independence, advertisements focused more on chai as a mode of conversation, rather than just a beverage. Their slogan, Rishton mein garmahat layein, reinforced the idea of tea as a nurturer of relationships. The advertisements that once sought to discipline Indians into British tastes now spoke in the vernacular and used visuals that turned a colonial commodity into a shared national identity.

"Thodi aur gori hoti toh shaayad..."

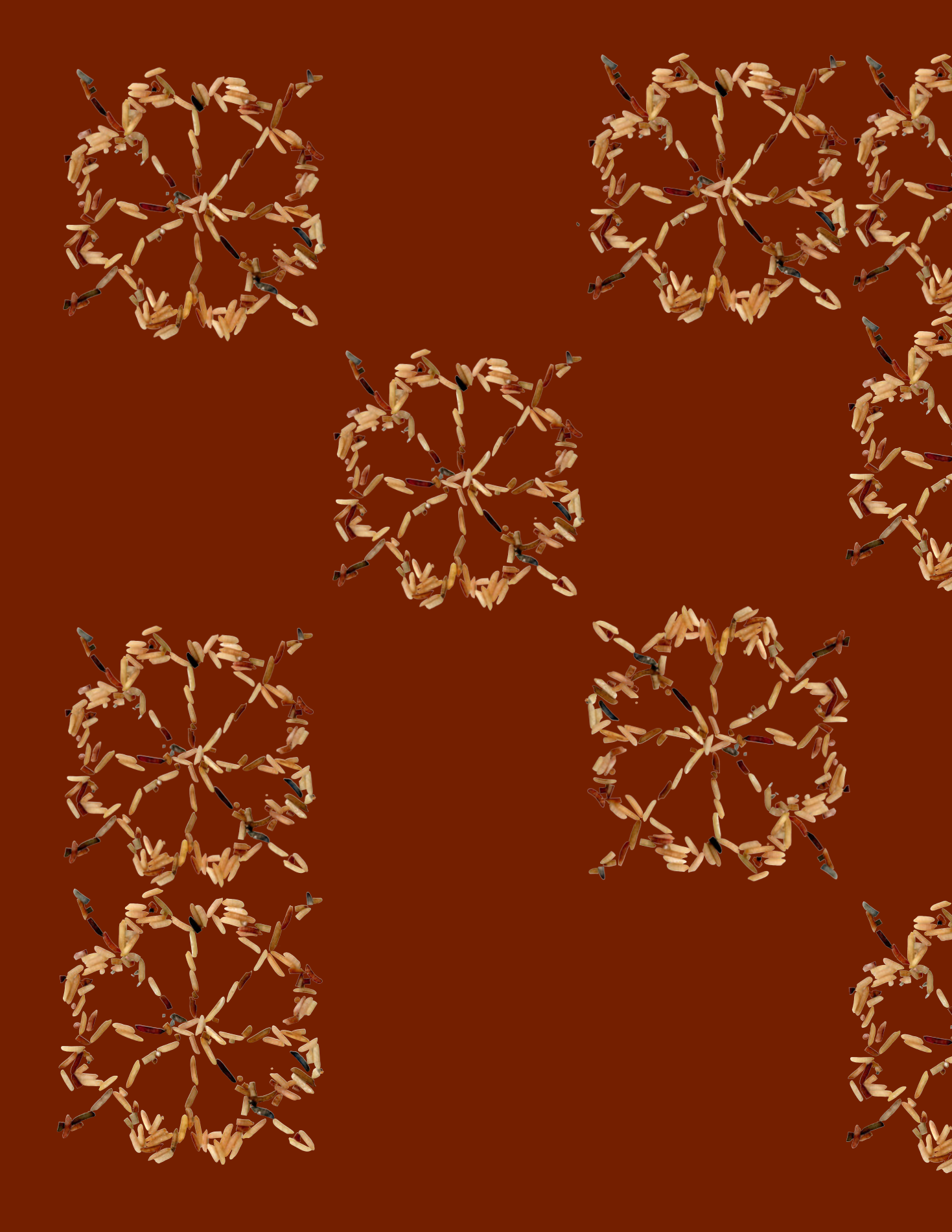
What makes a woman ideal? Even today, the answer centers on a language of beauty shaped by cosmetics, recycling many of the ideas propagated pre-independence. Advertisements for products like Oatine Snow, a face cream, asked wives whether they would greet their husbands with a "tired face", portraying beauty as a duty within the household. These unattainable beauty standards did not dissolve after independence, but were adapted to appeal to modern society.

One of the clearest examples is the advertising of Fair & Lovely, which showed women with the same face and features becoming progressively lighter after using this cream and thus, becoming "more desirable, confident, and beautiful."
In a country where most people are naturally melanin-rich, such advertisements encouraged women to view a natural aspect of their bodies as a flaw. Although eventually renamed to Glow & Lovely, the entrenched idea of whiteness persisted and could not undo the long history of colourism that the brand has built its identity on.

Aage aage badhta hai India. Amul doodh peeta hai India!

Founded in 1946, just 9 months before independence, Amul created an identity for itself that extended beyond the sale of dairy products. Unlike many advertisements that continued to inherit colonial aspirations, Amul is an example of linking consumption to national economic self-assertion. By addressing consumers with Hinglish, regional dialects, political satire, and pop-culture references, the advertisement created an intimate relationship with its consumers. From discussing the Mandal Commission, annual union budgets, and GST to films like Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge, Chak De! India, and Dil Dhadhakne Do, the Amul girl, with her blue hair and polka-dot dress, became a commentator on daily life in a vernacular idiom. She became the brand's visual identity, a style that could even transform movie stars, sportspersons, and politicians into an instantly recognizable mascot for Amul. "Taste of India" didn't just talk about their products and the idea of swadeshi, but about the sentiments and memories that we associate with an Indian identity.

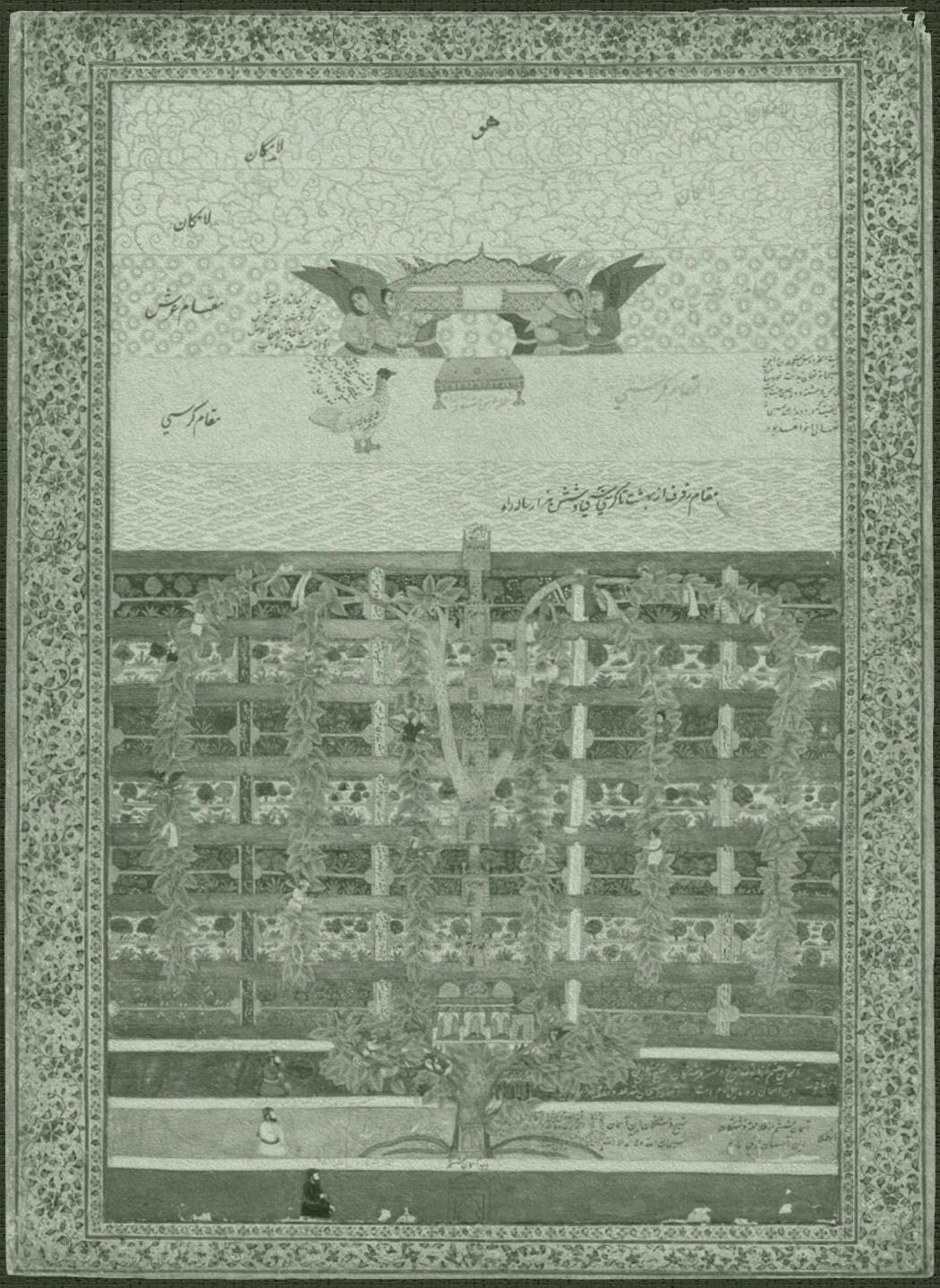
Advertisements not only reflect the ideals of our nation, but they also actively construct it. The colonial scripts that once governed advertisements were rearticulated by nationalist discourse and later rewritten by global capitalism. We inherited not only products but also ways of seeing and cultural expressions. To question these advertisements is to question how our identities have been shaped and internalised, allowing us to see past passive consumption and to recognise how such ideals continue to inform Indian identities today.



Being

Look at all the trees, look how

Written by Nayyab Naveed



The Higher Rejions of Paradise and Heaven, Freer Gallery of Art

Designed by Shlok Dey

they're defending the universe

You're sitting on the edge of the wall that circles Shah Rukn-e-Alam's shrine, an eminent 13th and 14th century Sufi Saint from Multan. You gaze at the blue and white tiles shimmering over you in the arid landscape. You recall how you read that Shah Rukn-e-Alam was part of the *Suhrawardiyya* Sufi order, and you yearn for your Nana again. Nana Abu was also Suhrawardiyya and you wonder if he ever came to pay his respects to this place; with its blue and terracotta tiles scathing under the Punjab sun. He must have, you think to yourself. You ruminate while staring at a towering presence of a *neem* tree that visitors of the shrine are nestled under. They're praying, rather desperately, and you can't help but see yourself in them. A red cloth tied to one of the tree's boughs is whimpering in the wind. So are all the acid pink shopping-bags that are tied by folks who can't afford the red cloth. A man with a wooden leg is limping mindlessly around the trunk. A child is spraying millet towards the pigeons. You check your phone and it's 43 degrees Celsius. 43 degrees. One would think you can't survive in that kind of heat, yet here we all are, praying our little prayers with our momentous wretchedness. Something in you says the Saint buried inside has something to do with our ability to persist through the worst. The Saint, and of course his towering neem tree.

The neem at Shah Rukn-e-Alam is not anomalous: trees have long been subjects of a larger devotional tradition in Islam. A scholar of the Islamic book arts, Christiane Gruber, discusses in her essay "The Tree as an Animal-esque Plant" how the Lote Tree (*sidrat al-muntaha*) is one of the major cosmological trees in the Qur'an, mentioned in two verses in the text (53:12-18). Texts inspired by the Quranic verses describe the Prophet Muhammad encountering the sidrat al-muntaha during his celestial ascension to Paradise, with the tree "spreading shade" in the "garden of eternal dwelling"—a description that has inspired visual depictions of the Prophet's ascension that pronounced the tree's extended size and umbrage, and adorned its drooping branches with angels holding turbans, gems, and luxurious fabrics for the paradise dwellers.

Shrine Shah Rukn-e-Alam

Like the Lote Tree, the palm is given an elevated status in Islamic lore as well, most of it finding expression in manuscript illustrations. Gruber argues how, in visual depictions, the palm serves as an "arboreal reminder of Muhammad's early *imam-hood*," along with his empathy towards his vegetal companion who, in an account from the Hadith tradition, ran towards the Prophet and wept profusely because the Prophet had stopped leaning against the palm after delivering his sermon in Madinah. The tree felt abandoned and "moaned like a camel," and only felt better after the Prophet Muhammad calmed it down with the touch of his hand.

This story illustrates how, in Muslim conceptual thought, the tree is a being that both feels and speaks. In visual culture, the palm tree thus became a recurrent feature in depictions of the Prophet Muhammad's mosque complex in Madinah—a site that eventually acted as a green conservatory and watering hole that preserved and promoted the Prophet's arboreal vestiges and miracles.

Oak of Mamre

You see a similar sacred demarcation of landscape across the Muslim world happening in Palestine with the Oak of Mamre, loated in the city of Hebron in the West Bank. It is believed that the oak marks the spot where Abraham moved his tent and met the three angels of God, as narrated in Genesis (13:18 and 18:1-22). However, a more pronounced eco-spiritual architectural practice where trees and shrines of Saints are conjoined to build a unified structure is seen in the oak-shrine of the Shadhili Sufi, Ibn Mashish in northern Morocco . His shrine consists of a white-washed enclosure made of stone that is built around a large oak that the devotees believe to be growing out of Ibn Mashish's body housed in the tomb. Through these architectural markers, you see how Muslim spiritual leaders and companion trees are often inextricably linked.

As you sit in the courtyard of Shah Rukn-e-Alam's shrine, you think of how lovingly the devotees have wrapped themselves to the neem tree; how lovingly they sit under its shade; and how lovingly they fuse their bodies with the Saint's.

You can see how the act of decorating a tree serves as a physical representation that invokes an ancient form of veneration and symbolises the integration of the human and the non-human in the process of sacralisation. Environmental writer and artist Louise Fowler-Smith, in her article "Adorning and Adoring", surveys tree veneration practices in India and argues how decoration on trees such as applying pigment to the bark, or tying offerings such as ribbons, string, cloth, bells, bangles, cradles, flowers, beads, chains, and locks of hair to the branches function as a kind of offering. This transforms the tree into a channel between the worshipper and the deity. Moreover, Rana P.B. Singh, a scholar of cultural geography, argues that through these actions of adornment, the sacred tree becomes the axis mundi, echoing religious studies theorist Mircea Eliade's famous concept of the 'cosmic pillar' that links the human realm to the divine. Consequently, Fowler Smith argues that the physical adornment of the tree is integral to its value for thosewho venerate it.

Oak Shrine of Shadili Sufi, Ibn Mashish

It's also important to mention the relevance of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Indian tribal custom when talking about South Asian Sufism due to their embeddedness in India's religious landscape when Sufism made its way to the region. Louise Fowler-Smith notes how trees and forests have long commanded respect and devotion across India, with ancient texts, including the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, and the *Puranas*, frequently emphasizing the sanctity of trees and the necessity of their preservation. Hindu communities throughout India often venerate a distinct local deity, the *gramadevata*, which is considered "synonymous with the locality and everything within it". Since the gramadevata is not visible to the community, a specific object or location is chosen to focus acts of worship, with the most common one being a tree or a grove of trees, with the tree itself embodying the local deity. However, where Sufi practices might differ is that the Saint is seen as a portal to Allah rather than a god or deity itself.

Saints, or what people refer to in Urdu as *auliya* or *pir*, can be translated as 'friends of Allah,' individuals who possess a crucial position in larger cosmological function due to their spiritual proximity to the Creator.

Within many Sufi traditions persists the belief in a hidden hierarchy of saints (often described as the *abdal*) where a fixed number of spiritually perfected beings sustain the moral and metaphysical balance of the world, often through acts of piety. In popular understanding across South Asia, this number is frequently remembered as thirty-six. These saints are not always visible, nor are they confined to their graves. Their presence is diffused across the landscape and works quietly to preserve harmony in a world perpetually on the brink of collapse. It is within this cosmology that the relationship between saint and tree begins to shift from one of metaphor to one of ontology.

If the saint's body does not end with death but extends into the material world through shrines, relics and shade—then the tree that grows from or beside the tomb cannot be understood as incidental. It becomes a continuation. A limb. A breathing extension of God's *barkat* (blessing).

While Fowler-Smith and others locate tree veneration within Hindu and indigenous frameworks where the tree may be the deity; Sufi practice offers a more relational configuration. The tree is not worshipped as God; but rather approached as a living conduit of the saint's proximity to God. Can you not then, say that tree is animate with saintly presence? Can we not say the Saint doesn't just reside beside the tree, but persists through it? You cannot help but be reminded of Kedarnath Singh's poem, *Defending the Universe.*

Kedarnath Singh's tree, though desiccated, stands as a sentinel; with its few remaining leaves performing a labour disproportionate to their scale.

Wearing the wobbly wooden
sandals of roots
it was standing before me
guarding the border,
like Brahmarakshas
of Muktibodh
a tall, huge, desiccating
tree with only a few leaves
left waving on the top.

How magnificent it was to
view on the very top of
a dwindling tree the
swaying of the leaves.

In a severe drought
they were there
defending the universe.

-Kedarnath Singh

Read alongside Sufi cosmology, this image begins to resonate differently. The labour of holding the world together and maintaining its balance despite visible decay is precisely the work attributed to the hidden saints. You then wonder if the tree is not just like the saint in this moment, but is also functioning in the same order of existence.

You look at the acid pink shopping bags again. They're flickering in the wind and seem to look fresher than the red and green threads. You wonder how most of the offerings are not uniform, or even precious. They are whatever the body can spare; in this case, bodies that belong to a land consistently drowning in monsoon deluges, excessive polymer waste and the sweltering heat of 43 degree temperature. It's not a surprise to then see plastic wound tightly around the twigs of the neem despite the tree's lenticels maybe gasping for air. Here the neem stands and continues to give shade, to gather bodies beneath it, and become an archive of human desperation even as it is slowly burdened by the very practices that sustain its sanctity.

In regions like Sindh and South Punjab where Shah Rukn-e-Alam's tomb is one of many shrines peppered within the geography, where ecological destruction continually scorches the land and repeatedly unmakes it, the persistence of such trees takes on an added urgency. They become sites of spiritual refuge as well as material shelters. To sit beneath them is to experience a form of protection that is at once ecological and metaphysical; extending beyond the visible realm.

If we return, then, to the Sufi belief in the unseen saints who uphold the world, a question begins to press itself forward. If the saint's body extends into the tree, and if the work of the saint is to preserve balance, then can the tree be excluded from this labor? Or must we understand it as participating within the same order?

Perhaps then, among the unseen thirty-six who are said to defend the world, some do not walk among us in human form at all. Perhaps they stand, rooted but weathered, their leaves trembling at impossible heights, holding together what would otherwise fall apart. Like the tree in Kedarnath Singh's poem, parched and dwindling, they remain:

defending the universe.

Neem Tree

HOME

house, abode, dwelling, habitat

घर

/ghar/

गृह, सदन, आलय, ठिकाना

Written by Mehak Ailani
Designed by Chahak Surana

I speak in echoes, not origins.
लोग कहते हैं, अपनी भाषा में सोचो—पर कौन सी ?

مان سمجهان ٿو، پر مون کي آواز نه ٿو ياد اچي.

I write in English. I feel in silence.
शब्द तो हैं, पर घर नहीं उनमें।

نمنهجي بزان ٿجين ۾گ يٽل رد ي٘ت ڇُلل ائلو.

My mother tongue is a question mark.
कभी लगता है, मैं अनुवाद में ही पैदा हुआ।

مان دعا وانگر ڇالهائيندو آهيان — اڌ ڳم، اڌ ڇالهايل.

English sits in my mouth like a practiced lie.
मैं अपने ही उच्चारण से अनजान हूँ।

مون کي ڇالهائڻ ايندو آهي، پر پڇڻ نٿو ايندو, توهان ڪير آهيو ؟

Is it the language I cry in, or the one I hide?
जिस जुब़ान में दादी चुप रहती थी, वही क्या मेरी हैं ?

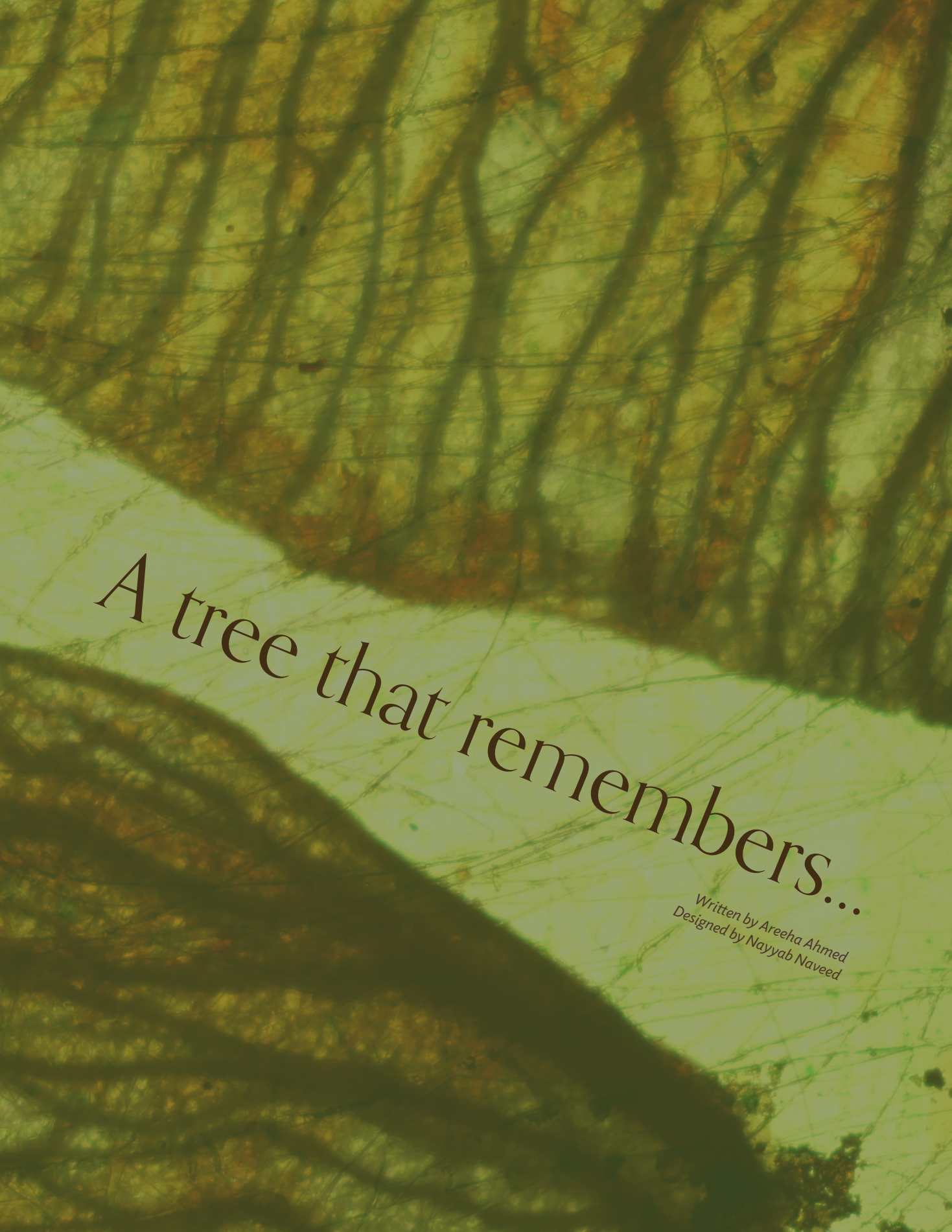
اها زبان جنهن ۾ نانوَءِ آخري لفظ چيو — وسامي ويل خواب.

Sometimes, I call it my mother tongue.
कभी वो थपकी सी लगती हैं, कभी सरहद।

هئي ؟ ڪڏهن ڪڏهن، زبان ماءُ وانگر لڳي ٿي، پر ماءُ ڪهڙي ملڪ جي

But other times —
it is just
a voice
without a country.

ل ام رک رزگ ےس ڈور س وی ڈ ن اوج ون ش وپ ش وخ ک ی ا وک م اش ک ی ا ی ک ی رون ج
رپ ی رٹ پ ں ام ارخ ں ام ارخ ےک رک خ ر اک س ارک گ ن ری چ روا اچ ن ہ پ رپ ڈور
م ول ع م ل ب ی ا ن ش ی ف اص اخ ےس ش ارخ ش ارت ی ن پ ا ن اوج ون ہ ی ۔ اگ ل ےن ل چ
ک ی راب ک ی راب ،ل اب ےئ وہ ےت ک م چ ،ں ی م ل ق ی ب م ل ی ب م ل ۔ اھت ات وہ
اک گ ن ر ی م اداب ۔ں وہ ی ئ گ ی ئ ان ب ےس ی ئ ال س ی ک ےم رس ای وگ ں ی ھچ ن وم
ب ال گ ےک گ ن ر ی ت ب رش ں ی م ج اک ےک س ج ےئ وہ ےن ہ پ ٹ وک رووا م رگ
زادن ا ص اخ ک ی ا ٹ ی ہ ٹ ی ل ف زب س رپ رس ،اوہ اک ٹ ا ل وھ پ ال ھ ک ھدا ک ی ا اک
اٹ پ ل درگ ےک ےل گ دن ب ول گ اک ک ل س دی ف س ،ی ئ وہ ی ھ ک ر ی ھ ڑی ٹ ےس
ی ڑھ چ ی ٹ وھ چ ک ی ا ی ک دی ب ں ی م ےرس ود ،ں ی م ب ی ج ی ک ٹ وک ھ ت اہ ک ی ا ،اوہ
۔ اھت ات گ ل ےن ام ھ گ ےک آ ں ی م ےزم ی ھ ب ک ی ھ ب ک ےس ج ےئ وہ ےڑک پ
زی ت ی س ک اوہ دن ت روا درس ۔ہ ن ام ز اک ےڑاج روپ رھ ب ۔ی ھ ت م اش ی ک ےت ف ہ ہ ی
رث ا ھ چ ک اک س ا رپ ن اوج ون س ا رگ م ی ھ ت ی ت گ ل ےک آ رپ م س ج ح رط ی ک راھد
اھ ٹ ا م دق زی ت ےی ل ےک ےن رک م رگ وک دوخ گ ول روا اھت ات وہ ں ی ہ ن م ول ع م
ےس ا ں ی م ےڑاج ےت اڑک ڑک س ا ےس ی ج ی ھ ت ہ ن ی ک س ا ےس ا رگ م ےھ ت ےہ ر
ات ک پ ٹ ن پ ک ن اب اس ی ا ےس ل اھ ڈ ل اچ ی ک س ا ۔وہ اہ ر آ ازم اڑب ں ی م ےن ل ہ ٹ
س ا ےئ وہ ےت اڑود اڑوھ گ ٹ پ رس رک ھ ک ی دے س ی ہ رود ےل او ے گ ن ات ہ ک اھت
ی ل اخ ک ی ا ۔ات ی د رک ں ی ہ ن ےس ےراش ا ےک ی ڑھ چ ہ و رگ م ےت ک پ ل ف رط ی ک
رک ہ ک ''وی ک ن ی ھ ت ون'' ےن س ا رگ م ی ک ر رک ھ ک ی دے س ا ی ھ ب ی س ک ی ٹ
ف رط ی ک ےص ح ق ن ور اب ہ دای زے ک ل ام ہ وے س ی ج ے س ی ج ۔ای دل اٹ ی ھ ب ےس ا
ی ٹ ی س ےس ہ ن م ہ و ۔ی ھ ت ی ت اج ی ت ھ ڑب ی ل اچ ن وچ ی ک س ا ،اھت ات اج ات چ ن ہ پ
س ا ی ہ ھ ت اس ےک س ا ۔اگ ل ےن ل اک ن ن ھ د ی زی رگ ن ا ک ی ا ی ک ص ق رے ک اج ب
س اپ س آ ب ج ہ ع ف د ک ی ا ۔ےگ ل ےن ھ ٹ ا ےئ وہ ےت ک رھ ت ی ھ ب ں وٴاپ ےک
ٹ وھ ج رک ڑود ےن س ا ہ ک ای آ ش وج اس ی ا ھ چ ک ی گ راب ک ی وت اھت ں ی ہ ن ی ئ وک
ےت س ار ۔وہ اہ ر وہ ل ی ھ ک اک ٹ ک رک ای وگ ی ک ش ش وک ی ک ےن ی د ل اب ٹ وم
م اش ت ق و س ا رگ م ی ھ ت ی ت اج ف رط ی ک ن ڈراگ س ن رال وج ی ئ آ ک ڑس ہ و ں ی م



A tree that remembers...

Written by Areeha Ahmed
Designed by Nayyab Naveed

Reality has always been a contested terrain. Even before language developed a name for it.

The question of what is real and who gets to say so was already being fought over long before any of us came to theorise it. If we put on a traditional psychoanalytical lens, we see that even the very first encounter a human has with reality is not a successful one. It is but mere misrecognition.

From the very first time a baby sees itself in the mirror, it does not see itself accurately. The baby sees a whole and unified entity, fundamentally at odds with the fragmented and rather uncoordinated experience of the self and the body it has. However, the gap between what we see and what we feel to be real never really closes. It just becomes more politically nuanced as we age.

As an interdisciplinary academic who has always found herself at the crossroads of theory and art, the conundrum of reality does not cease to fascinate me. Not merely as an intellectual exercise, but because the stakes keep getting higher. And the people losing the most are not the ones holding the formal theories.

Reality, in its materiality, does not float freely. It needs a medium to exist. To ground it. That medium can be something as basic as the air we breathe, the things our senses detect, or the way memory assembles itself in the human brain. But here is where the trouble begins. If reality requires a medium, it also requires a host. Something, or someone, that makes this reality 'cognizant' and 'legible'. And once we are amidst that, we have quietly let in a whole set of power relations through the back door.

The problem is not merely that a 'cognizant' reality might be an incomplete one. But the bigger problem is that requiring a host immediately invokes the logic of 'survival of the fittest'. Those who hold power, economic, physical, and social, establish hegemony not just over territories and resources, but over the very framework within which 'reality' is recognised. What gets to be real, and who gets to be real, becomes the same question.

We are living through a peculiar and rather ugly stretch in history, where power is not merely territorial in the old-fashioned sense; it is diffused. It grips. It grips the earth's resources and power over who lives and who dies. So, when power is everywhere, the hierarchy of realities is already in place. Before anyone even raises a hand to protest.

This is the space where the line between the medium and the message starts to dissolve. When both the channel of transmission and the thing being transmitted come under siege, the medium no longer merely documents reality. It enacts it. It grounds it. It becomes the last surviving proof of a world that power would rather erase.

And having one's realities systematically stripped away or replaced with silence is not just a lack of knowledge or incomplete knowledge.

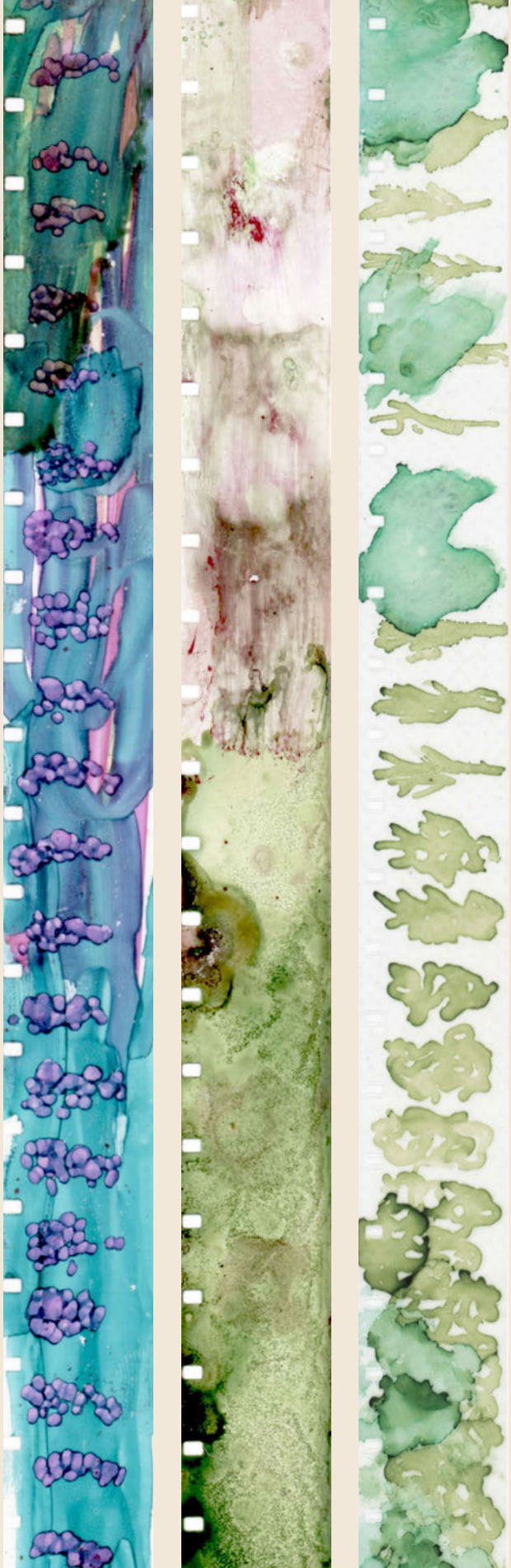
It is but a 'menticide'. The deliberate destruction of the mind's ability to make meaning out of the world. I understand it as a rather quiet, more deadly, and devastating version of occupation.

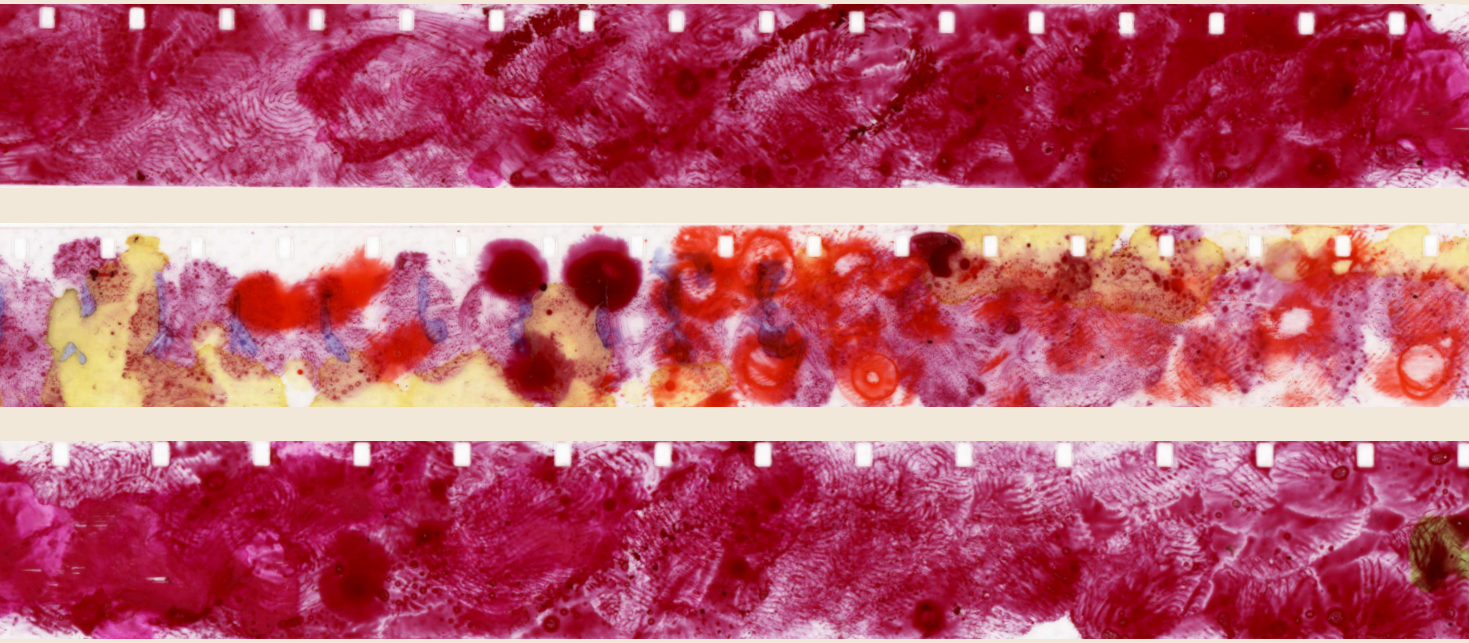
Now, as an academic trained within structures that insist on a very particular grammar of reality, I will be honest about one thing. That is, the medium through which reality exists has not always been my primary concern. After all, it was decided long ago, and apparently by consensus, that a properly formatted APA citation presents a more objective reality than, say, the hands of the person whose reality is being described.

However, this consensus easily forgets that the right to visibility is not a right equally available to everyone across the globe. And for some, visibility itself is a form of danger. It is within this tension, the gap between what can be archived and what must be protected from the archive, that I have always found the closest traces of raw reality, among the hosts themselves, and the cultural mediums they produce. Reality here exists not in the polished institutional records, but in the material act of making itself.

I came to this understanding not only through theory. I came to it through geography. I grew up in a post 9/11 Pakistan. A landscape already being redrawn by someone else's war; where the paranoia of the security apparatus feels like an inescapable climate. It is something you merely learn to move through.

I can think of, in my own way, the particular texture of this ecology. The rather quiet disappearances, the things that would get removed for 'safety' and were never discussed again.





The normalising of what should never have been normalised. Therefore, when I encountered Nayyab Naveed's *Nur's Shehtoot*, I was not merely an outside observer studying someone's loss. I was standing in a version of the same place, holding a different piece of the same story.

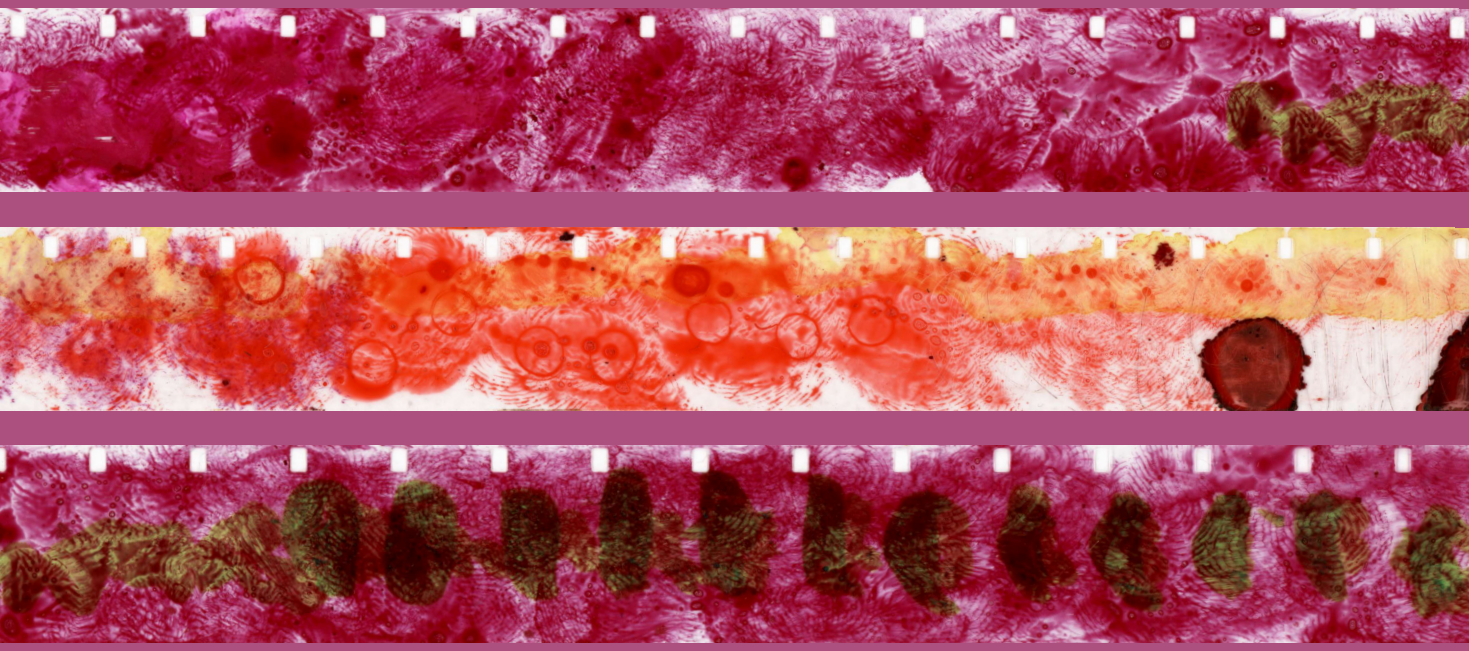
Naveed's experimental film *Nur's Shehtoot* (tr. Nur's Mulberry) is not merely a documentary. For it to be a documentary, the viewer would have to be placed as a sympathetic observer. An observer who is present but safe. Moved but distant. Nur's Shehtoot does something far less comfortable and far more honest. It brings the viewer into an act of 'witness' through its materiality.

Naveed works directly on 16mm celluloid, often using a needle and a magnifying glass to scratch the emulsion; deleting, drawing, and marking. She also works with archival film strips (obtained from schools in Providence), staining and scratching those surfaces until they become something else entirely. Something elegiac. What survives in this film is not clean or easily recognisable. But it is marked, stained, altered by the act of surviving. And that is exactly the point.

The story she tells, on the other hand, is rather simple. A childhood friendship with a girl named Nur. A mulberry tree in a schoolyard. A tree that held their bond and its ecologies. Then, suddenly, one day, there is a bomb blast. Windows rattle. Children are frightened.

The next day, under the name of 'security', the tree was gone. It was cut down by the authorities, the authorities who recognised the reality of that tree merely in the grammar of 'security'. It is then that Naveed's voice breaks in the narration. The visuals bleed red. The film suddenly becomes an elegy.

This particular moment, i.e., the removal of the tree, is not merely a background detail in this story. However, it crystallises what I understand as the "bureaucratic logic of occupation". It is a mode of power that sees the world as fields of objects to be managed, rearranged, and, when necessary, eliminated. Under this logic, everything becomes disposable: a tree, a house, a river, a life.



It was not the bomb blast itself that severed the tree from the ground. The above-mentioned logic did. The decision stemming from this logic, to sever life from place, is what reveals the true depths of 'occupation'. The tree was not dead or diseased. It was cut down because its existence was deemed too 'risky' by the security apparatus.

What makes this film peculiar is that Naveed refuses the passivity of narration. She works on the celluloid instead. Scratching and staining it as an act of 'witness', making the film's materiality complicit in something that is neither pure representation nor pure preservation. It is something in between. Maybe a refusal?

Each mark on the film both conceals as well as reveals what lies beneath, mirroring the very logic of memory under siege—fragmented and textured. Her hands moving across the film strip almost mimics the gesture of reaching for what can no longer be touched.

She narrates in Urdu, her mother tongue. It is the language through which she knew Nur, and the tree, and probably the language through which she felt this loss more densely. The film also provides English subtitles for wider audiences. But it is here that the refusal I speculated about earlier emerges. Naveed deliberately withholds certain moments from translation. The words she speaks while her voice breaks down, while tears probably stream down her face, and the visuals bleed red, all these remain untranslated. Untranslatable, maybe? And therefore, to translate the untranslatable is to render it legible to the same standards that bureaucratic structures demand of a reality they have already decided to manage. By refusing this translation, Naveed asserts that her knowledge-making process is not accountable to those who would consume it as transparent objective information. There is a border. A refusal, where what she knows remains sovereign and agentive.

This is what linguist Robin Wall Kimmerer calls the "grammar of animacy", a linguistic structure that allows one to address a tree, a river, a mushroom,

not as an “it”, but as kin, as beings who are worthy of direct address. The film enacts this through form rather than language. To scratch the film is to speak the tree alive. To insist through one’s hands that what power sought to render disposable remains worthy of the most intimate form of documentation, the artist’s touch directly on the surface of memory itself.

The mulberry tree keeps on living through this film. Not in the soil, but in the story, the material, the bond between two school girls and a tree that no bureaucratic decision could fully undo. The knowledge that emerges from watching this film does not come in the traditional sense of argument or evidence. It comes in the way Naveed made the film; through feeling, through touch, through the slow and careful labour of hands on a surface the world left blank.

The film makes these choices and refusals, because the particular memory of loss that the film talks about needed a medium that could hold effect without flattening it into a mere explanation. The scratches on the film mimic the gesture of what cannot be touched any longer. The untranslated Urdu becomes an assertion of life. And the red bleeding on the screen becomes an elegy for the tree and the lost kinship.

This is also what Resistant Ecologies looks like. It is not a grand gesture of preservation, however, it is the insistence that the tree’s erasure from the physical space does not erase it from meaning and mattering. The mulberry tree continues living not in soil, but in the scratched film strip, in the untranslated words, in the multispecies bond between two girls. It insists that the tree’s severance and destruction is not final. And that it persists where it matters most, which are the spaces power cannot fully translate or control.

Reality is surely a contested terrain, but having objective methods to reach that reality only invites institutional politics. We build taxonomies and citation counts, as if truth requires our permission to stand. And perhaps this is what artists like Naveed teach academics like me: that reality, in its fullest and most honest form, has never needed our permission to exist. It has only needed someone willing to scratch it into the light.

ے ک گ ن ر ی ت ب ر ش ں ی م ج ا ک ے ک س ج ے ئ ی ہ ے ن ہ پ ٹ و ک ر و و ا م ر گ ا ک گ ن ر

ب د ن ب و ل گ ا ک ک ل س د ی ف س ، ی ئ ی ہ ی ھ ک ر ی ھ ڑ ی ٹ ے س ز ا د ن ا ص ا خ ک ی ا ٹ ی ہ ٹ ی ل ف

ی ی م ے ز م ی ھ ب ک ی ھ ب ک ے س ج ے ئ ی ہ ے ڑ ک پ ی ڑ ھ چ ی ٹ و ھ چ ک ی ا ی ک د ی ب ں ی م ے

م ی ھ ت ی ت گ ل ے ک آ ر پ م س ج ح ر ط ی ک ر ا ھ د ز ی ت ی س ک ا و ہ د ن ت ر و ا د ر س ۔ ہ ن ا م ز ا ک ے ڑ ا ج ر و پ ر ھ ر

ک س ا ے س ا ر گ م ے ھ ت ے ہ ر ا ھ ٹ ا م د ق ز ی ت ے ی ل ے ک ے ن ر ک م ر گ و ک د و خ گ و ل ر و ا ا ھ ت ا ت و ہ ں ی ہ ن

ک پ ٹ ن پ ک ن ا ب ا س ی ا ے س ل ا ھ ڈ ل ا چ ی ک س ا ۔ و ہ ا ہ ر آ ا ز م ا ڑ ب ں ی م ے ن ل ہ ٹ ے س ا ں ی م ے ڑ

ے ر ا ش ا ے ک ی ڑ ھ چ ہ و ر گ م ے ت ک پ ل ف ر ط ی ک س ا ے ئ ی و ہ ے ت ا ڑ و د ا ڑ و ھ گ ٹ پ ر س ر ک ھ ک ی د ے س

ی د ل ا ٹ ی ھ ب ے س ا ر ک ہ ہ ک ‘‘ و ی ک ن ی ھ ت و ن ’’ ے ن س ا ر گ م ی ک ر ر ک ھ ک ی د ے س ا ی ھ ب ی س ک ی ٹ

ن م ہ و ۔ ی ھ ت ی ت ا ج ی ت ھ ڑ ب ی ل ا چ ن و چ ی ک س ا ، ا ھ ت ا ت ا ج ا ت چ ن ہ پ ف ر ط ی ک ے ص ح ق ن و ر ا ب

ا ے ئ ی و ہ ے ت ک ر ھ ت ی ھ ب ں ؤ ا پ ے ک س ا ی ہ ھ ت ا س ے ک س ا ۔ ا گ ل ے ن ل ا ک ن ن ھ د ی ز ی ر گ ن ا ک ی ا

ی د ل ا ب ٹ و م ٹ و ھ ج ر ک ڑ و د ے ن س ا ہ ک ا ی آ ش و ج ا س ی ا ھ چ ک ی گ ر ا ب ک ی و ت ا ھ ت ں ی ہ ن ی ئ و ک س ا پ

ی و س ا ر گ م ی ھ ت ی ت ا ج ف ر ط ی ک ن ڈ ر ا گ س ن ر ا ل و ج ی ئ آ ک ڑ س ہ و ں ی م ے ت س ا ر ۔ و ہ ا ہ ر و ہ ل ی ھ ک ا ک

ھ د ی س ر و ا ا ی ک ہ ن خ ر ا ک ر ھ د ا ے ن س ا ہ ک ی ھ ت ی ہ ر س ر ب ی س ا د ا ی س ی ا ھ چ ک ر پ غ ا ب س ا ں ی م ے ر ہ ک

آ ت ن ا ت م ر د ق ی س ک ں ی م ت ا ن ک س و ت ا ک ر ح ی ک س ا ر ک چ ن ہ پ ب ی ر ق ے ک ت ب ے ک ہ ک ل م

ھ ک ر س ڑ ا ں ی م ں ی ت س آ ں ی ئ ا ب ی ک ٹ و ک ے ن س ا ے ئ ا ج ب ی ک ے ن ھ ک ر ں ی م ب ی ج ے س ج

ن ا ھ چ ک ر پ ے ڑ ک ٹ ک ی ا ے ک س ا ھ گ س ا پ ۔ ے ئ ا ج ر ت ا و ت و ہ ی ئ گ م ج د ر گ ھ چ ک ہ ک ا ت ، ا ر ی ھ پ

ک ے چ ب ۔ ا گ ل ے ن ھ ک ی د ل ی ھ ک ا ک ن ا ے س ی پ س چ ل د ی ڑ ب ر و ا ا ی گ ک ر ہ و ۔ ے ھ ت ے ہ ر ل ی ھ ک

ر ش ہ ت ف ر ہ ت ف ر ہ و و ت ا ی گ ا ل چ ی ہ ے ک ت ر ب ا ر ب ہ و ب ج ر گ م ے ہ ر ف و ر ص م ں ی م ل ی ھ ک ر ی غ ب

ے ک س ا ھ گ ے ئ ی و ہ ے ت گ ا ھ ب ے ھ چ ی پ ے ک ے ر س و د ک ی ا ے ئ ی و ہ ے ت س ن ہ ر ک ل ا ھ ب ن س د ن ی گ

م ا ش و س ا ۔ ا ی گ ھ ٹ ی ب ے ک آ ر پ س ا ہ ر و ا ی ڑ پ ر پ چ ن ب ی ل ا خ ک ی ا ی ک ٹ ن م ی س ر ظ ن ی ک ن ا و ج و ن

ت س ر پ ت ذ ل ہ ک ل ب ی ھ ت ہ ن ر ا و گ ش و خ ا ن ت د ش ہ ی ی ک س ا ۔ ی ھ ت ی ہ ر ا ج ی ت ھ ڑ ب ی ھ ب ر و ا ی د ر س

ے ہ ا ت ل ی ھ ک ل ھ ک ی ہ ہ د ا ی ز ں ی م ی د ر س س ا و ت ہ و ا ی ک ی ہ ا ن ہ ک و ت ا ک ے ق ب ط د ن س پ ش ی ع ے ک

ک ل ک ن ے س ں و ر د ھ ک ں و ن و ک ے ن پ ا ے ن پ ا ہ و ر و ا ں ی ہ ے ت ا ج ے ئ ا ل غ ر و ے س ی د ر س س ا ی ھ ب

ب و ل و ج ت س ج ی ہ ی ی ک ت ذ ل ل و ص ح ۔ و ہ ل ص ا ح ب ر ق ا ک ں و م س ج ہ ک ا ت ں ی ہ ے ت گ ل ے ن چ و س ی ک

ے ر س و د ے ک ح ی ر ف ت ر و ا ں ؤ ا م ن ی س ، ں و ہ ا گ ص ق ر ، ں و س ؤ ا ہ ی ف ا ک ، ں و ن ا ر و ت س ی ر ق ی ف و ت ب س

چ ر پ ی ر ٹ پ ، ی ہ ا ھ ت و ت ا و ہ ا ھ د ن ب ا ت ن ا ت ا ک ں و ل ک س ی ئ ا ب ر و ا ں و گ ن ا ت ، ں و ر

ب ی ص ن م ک ن ج ۔ ا ھ ت م ر گ ی ھ ب ر ا ز ا ب ا ک ت خ ر ف و د ی ر خ ں ی م ں و ن ا ک د ہ ی ر و د ی

ن ش و ر گ ن ر ا گ ن ر ی ک ں و ن ا ک د ر و ا ں و ہ ا گ ح ی ر ف ت ن ا ے ڑ ھ ک ے ڑ ھ ک ے س ی ہ ر و د ہ و ، ی

WRITTEN BY HARSH THAKKAR ● DESIGNED BY SHLOK DEY

MAI TOH RASTE SE JA RAHA THA

A country known to be a historic repository of gastronomical sciences—or wait, I mean khaane ka khazana—India has an endless culinary affair. Apart from a delectable experience, food is also a cultural experience, a rather local one. Indian street food carts play a crucial role in defining this diverse urban condition. One of the biggest factors curating such public life is the accessibility of street food carts, and amongst these there exist some experiences that propel you into a nostalgic departure, into the lands where one meets their younger self.

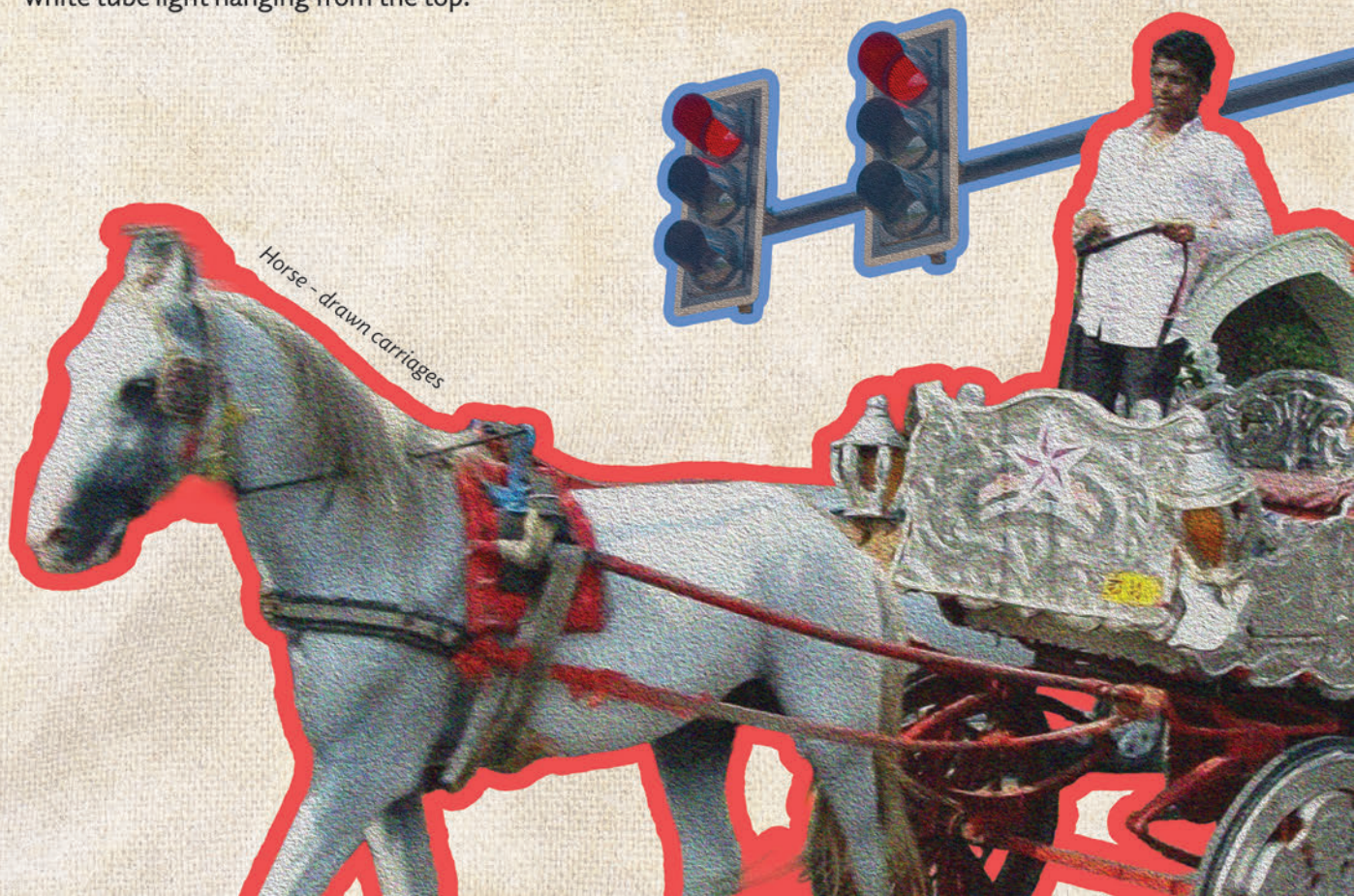
Such was the classical epoch of a town once called Bombay, now known as the city of Mumbai. Between Bombay and Mumbai lies not merely a shift in name, but a shift in temperament. Bombay evokes the slow clang of tramways, the rhythm of horse-drawn carriages, and the black-and-yellow taxis waiting at Marine Drive. Mumbai asserts itself in infrastructure and finance. Between the two lies a vortex of stories, memories, and unfiltered voices which echo from each and every *gully*.

These *gullies* of Bombay are populated by the de-facto occupancy of street food carts. An essential commodity defining South Asian culture as well as India's social atmosphere—that moment while eating *pani-puri* on the streets, enveloped by the utter chaos of the city—food is a silhouette of the people and the passing time with which the city evolved and the *gullies* changed.

Since its vintage days, street vendors have held a ubiquitous charm in Bombay. These are the vendors who were thronged by voices of children shrieking with their little palms barely managing to grab a finger, tugging a parent towards the cart, pleading for a treat of tiny blobs of ice cream in equally small, crunchy cones. These carts would have a shimmering tinge of silver all around, thanks to the metallic elements in their structure. The ice boxes holding classic flavours like rose, chocolate, strawberry and *pista* were illuminated by a lone white tube light hanging from the top.

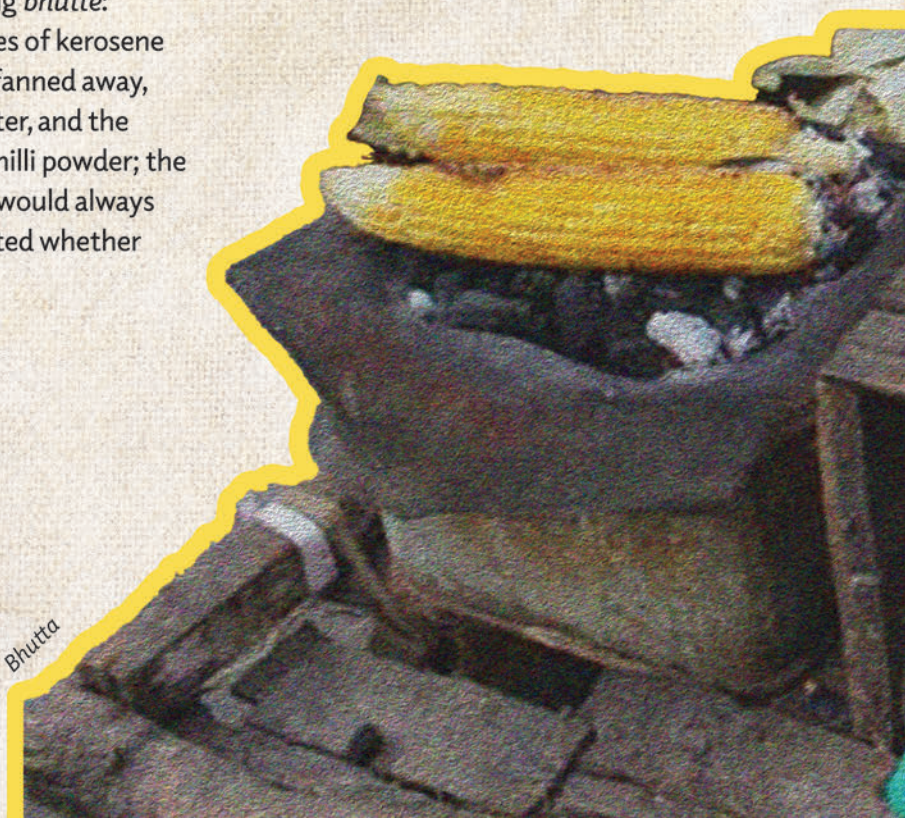
A popular sight at Juhu Beach, such ice cream vendors gradually moved out and spread across multiple spots around the city.

Vendors have had a place in everyone's memory across generations. Sitting on the balcony of a colonial-style house in Dadar, you would hear a bicycle bell ring. This crystal clear chime came from a vendor cycling past, two tin boxes strapped to either side of his rear wheel. These boxes were stacked with a delight of yellow ochre *samosas* awaiting the slightest whisk of the air to carry their scent into thewindows and over to the people lazing in their homes on a Sunday morning.



Masala peru

While walking down the streets of Bombay, people never missed the sight of fresh fruits and vegetables, sprinkled with water to attract consumers. A healthy treat lay beyond the sight of the munchies: *perus*, cut into four equal halves, sprinkled with salt and red chilli powder. Often near parks, these vendors could also be found on the sides of highways, usually accompanied by another member of the family selling *bhutte*: whole corncobs are grilled by the flames of kerosene pots with the delectable smoke being fanned away, and served with lemon juice, extra butter, and the versatile combination of salt and red chilli powder; the perfect pitstop. A road trip to Alibaug would always encounter a pause while families debated whether they should get a guava or a *bhutta*.



Bhutta

On a dry summer afternoon, as the final school bell rings, flocks of students would rush out and run towards the **gola wale bhaiyya**, an ice popsicle vendor. Amid the rush to catch the departing school bus, and the ecstasy of securing a quick bite against the dreary sun, the vendor would be prepared for a state of absolute frenzy. Shades of *kala khatta*, orange, and *kacchi kairi*; the phrase "**bhaiyya sab flavours daal dena**" or "uncle add all the flavours" stained every tongue that craved this summer respite.

Kala khatta gola

During the monsoon, the rains always made getting into an auto rickshaw a challenge. Only after a series of awkward umbrella maneuvers could one get in dry and untouched by the downpour.

Such a day would call for an impromptu stopover by the *vada pav* vendor. Rushing to cross the street, unarmed with an umbrella in order to make it as quickly as possible, and getting past the group of people surrounding the cart was a challenge. After about three jabs and shrugs, one would squeeze in and reach the warm and nutty smell of frying *vadas*, ready to be smashed with a dollop of garlic chutney and wrapped into a double layer of newspaper, wound up with a thin thread, and thrust into one's hands to rush back into the auto rickshaw while the meter flashed increasing amounts. It was as pronto as the run-on it sounds like.

A nibble which tasted the best outdoors, the *chaat* vendors had a secret wizarding recipe for pani-puris and *bhel*. Amongst all the vendor stalls lined up in the multitude of *khau gullies* in the city, the pani-puri vendor would always be the most popular one.

People would make a trek to the vendor just to win bets of who ate the most pani-puris. After a duel of some thirty pani-puris each, the heart would always crave more.

Vada pav

One could ask "**Bhaiyya ek sookha puri dena**," translating to "Uncle, give me a dry puri please," and the vendor would give two puris instead, with extra *chaat masala*.

These vendors linger—in sounds, in smell, in fleeting encounters. They exist in memories. They exist in stories. They exist in voices. Their omnipresence despite their dwindling numbers is what makes Bombay as nostalgic as it can get.

Those khau gullies in Bombay, those food markets lined up along narrow streets—their existence and the culture surrounding street food carts have undergone radical changes since inception.

Pani-puri

Although the most essential topic while considering the social and cultural phenomenon revolving around street food carts in Mumbai is the importance of these street food vendors. The hundreds of thousands of hawkers that line Mumbai's streets are emblematic of the city's compelling—and to some, frustrating—contradictions. Although most are unlicensed, they profoundly shape the appearance and feel of the city. Despite these challenges, their existence and their continuity of bearing the harsh summer sun or the moist yet muddy rains of Mumbai, becomes an informal emblem of the city. Oftentimes, as observed, food items are used in mass media like movies, popular culture, and publications to create certain imagery pertinent to a specific city. The perception of a city—such as Mumbai—lies within a vada pav or a *dabeli* and is shaped by the contributions of the street food vendors.

With changing times, it was a fact that many of the first new symbols of globalised Mumbai, such as shopping malls and clubs designed with an international aesthetic, facilitated a narrative of a city in transition. It overtook the city and changed its identity radically.

Masala papad

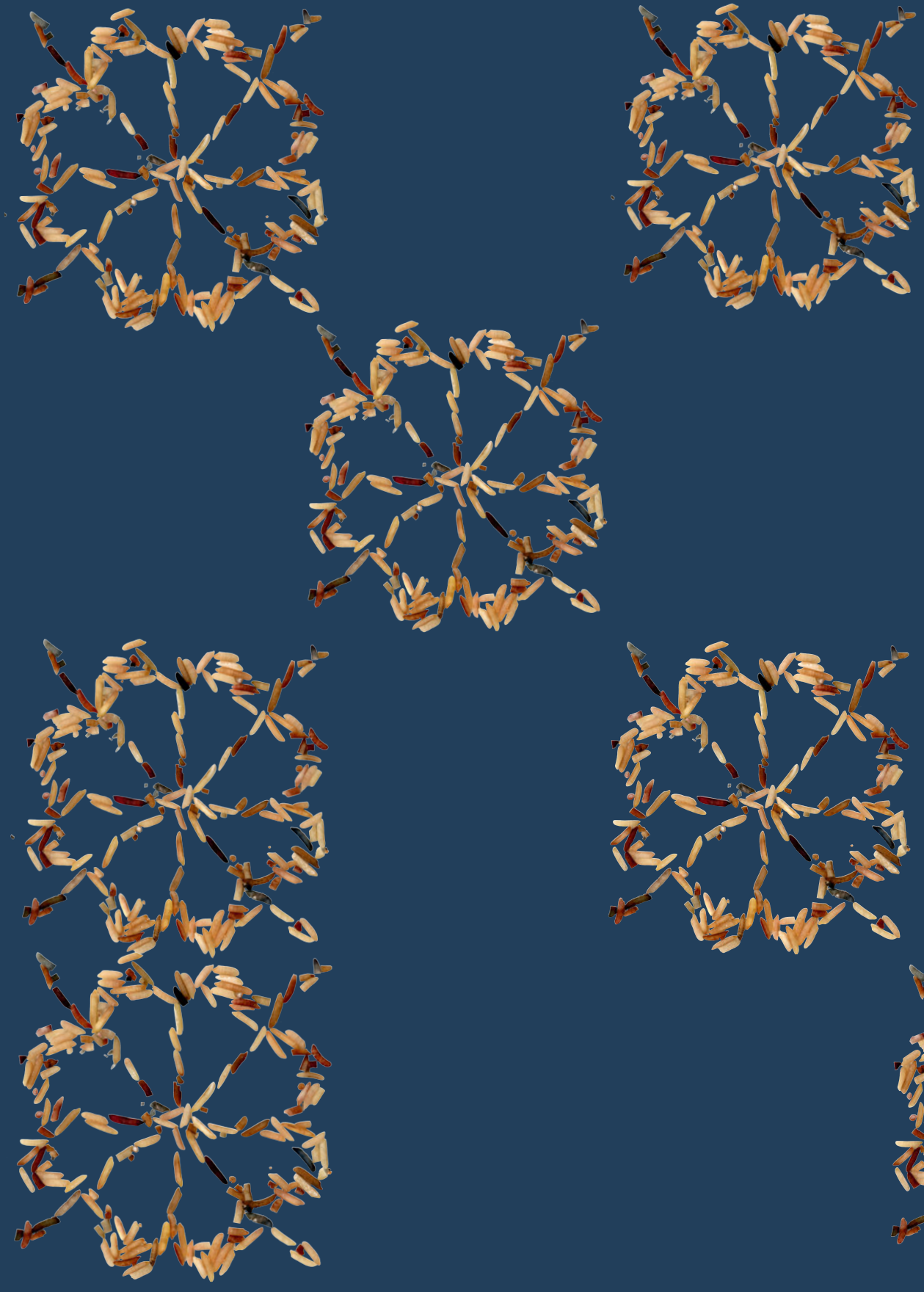
Similarly, it affected street food carts and street food consumption patterns as well. Mumbai, when translated from Bombay, brought about a whole new wave of food items. Gone were the days of street food as we knew it—now it's *chatpata momo* with a spicy and tangy sauce, *masala papad* with mounds of cheese and beans in lieu of tacos, *paneer* sushi with *teekha chutney*—a fusion galore.

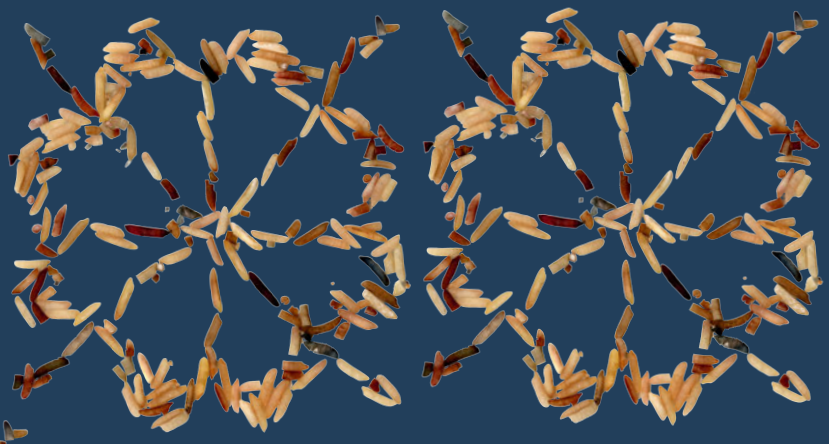
The gullies, which once used to be bustling with people craving food on the streets, were now amassed with people frolicking and asking vendors for directions to a cake shop— "bhaiyya vo cake ki dukaan kaha hai?" A middle ground had begun to emerge between street food and fine dining—small stores offering a "cleaner" and more systematised alternative to eating. What came about was a supposedly "better" option, one that preferred a controlled dining environment while often disregarding the quality of food itself. Missing were the qualities that define street food: the freshness of street food, the *khushboo* of simmering red chillies or the whiff of chaat masala, the collective impatience of strangers waiting for their food, each tracking the order before theirs—an experience that cannot be replicated by a conventional restaurant setting. Its spirit lies in the simplicity of the streets. Such a change stole the joy of eating at street food stalls and stripped it of its original charm.

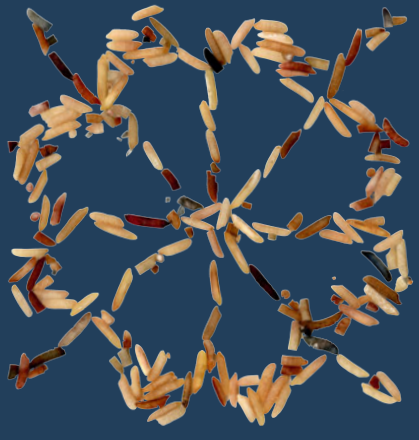
As much as the monuments, culture, and social atmosphere of Mumbai attract tourists, the food of Bombay is at the forefront of these attractions. Street food carts carry the city's charm to every neighbourhood they inhabit.

The ringing of bicycle bells, the frenzy of people, and the eating competitions. Street food carts have been objects of change across generations, forging a profound relationship with communities. These relationships live, breathe, and walk through each and every gully of the city we call Mumbai... or Bombay. The city oscillates between the two—

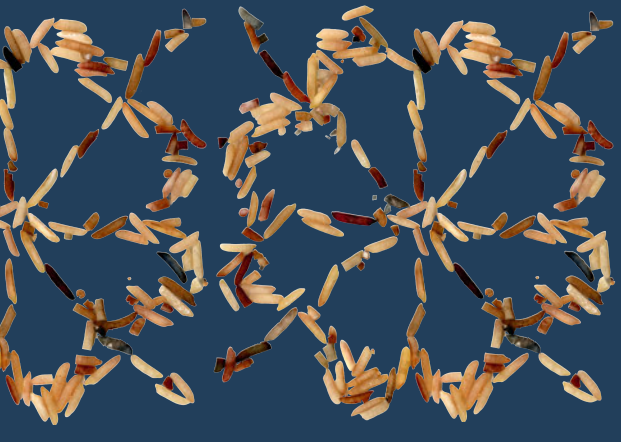
never fully one,
never entirely the other.







Doing



Performing Femininity

Written by Ananya Uddanti
Designed by Pallavi Mallik

The Production of Gendered Bodies in Kuchipudi's Bhāmākalāpam

In the Bhāmākalāpam, an energetic dance-drama, Saint Narada provides Krishna with the Parijata flower. Krishna gives this to his wife Rukmini, rather than Satyabhama. Satyabhama, the daughter of King Satrajit and one of Krishna's 1600 wives, is angered. Krishna then takes the entire sacred Parijata tree for her. The Bhāmā-kalāpam is a dance piece critical to the body of Kuchipudi, a classical Indian dance form that originates from a history of male-only dance drama. Through the analysis of choreographies by Siddhendra Yogi and Vempati Chinna Satyam, this essay explores how the male dancer's body and performative femininity have shaped Kuchipudi and reinforced normative gender roles.

Krishna and Satyabhama Storm the Citadel of Naraka, folio 97 from a Bhagavata Purana.

✳ Origins of Kuchipudi and Siddhendra Yogi ✳

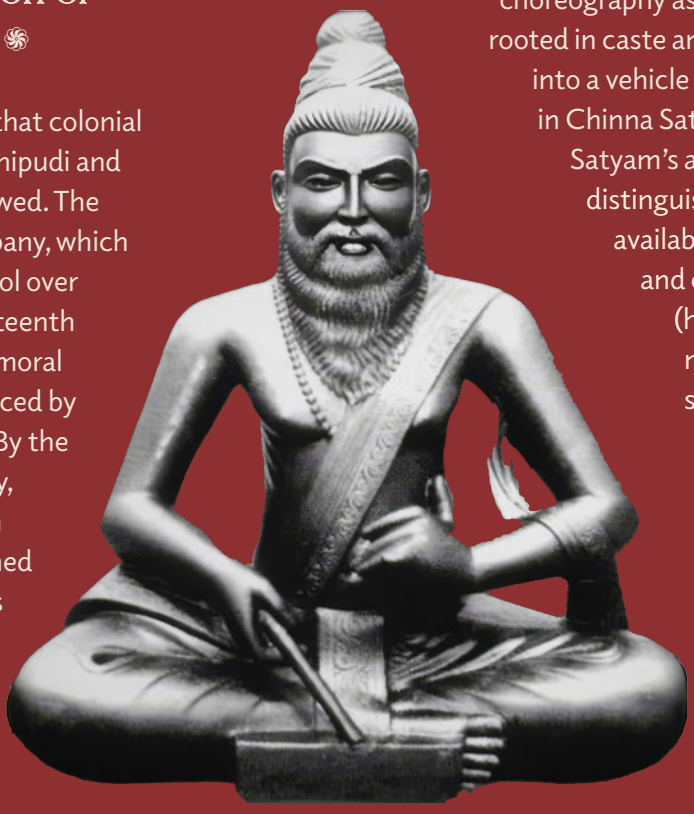
Saint Siddhendra Yogi, the founder of Kuchipudi, grounded the dance form in divinity, as he abandoned his worldly ties to dedicate his life to Lord Krishna. During his vision of Krishna and Satyabhama, Siddhendra is said to transform by embodying Satyabhama herself. Inspired, he composed a piece called Bhāmākalāpam, the story of Satyabhama's love, longing, and anger. By adopting the feminine voice to express divine love, Siddhendra came to represent an ideal of *bhakti*, portraying Satyabhama's emotional relationship with Krishna as forms of devotional attachment to the divine. The Brahmin male performers in the tradition embody these emotions physically and theatrically to express devotion.

❁ Colonial Reform and the Reconstruction of Classical Dance ❁

It is important to note that colonial rule reshaped how Kuchipudi and Bhāmākalāpam are viewed. The British East India Company, which began expanding control over India in the early seventeenth century, brought new moral and social ideas influenced by Victorian Christianity. By the late nineteenth century, missionaries and Indian social reformers launched what became known as the Anti-Nautch Movement, which aimed to remove dance from temples and public life. During the mid-twentieth century, when the Indian state helped reshape classical dance traditions for national audiences, Kuchipudi changed significantly. Once a ritual performance by all-male *bhagavatulu* (artists who performed dance-dramas) troupes, Kuchipudi gradually evolved into a solo stage form that women could perform, thanks to the state-sponsored reconstruction of Indian dance in the mid-twentieth century. At the same time, many of the original village performers and their traditions became less visible in official histories of dance.

✺ Vempati Chinna Satyam and the Urbanization of Kuchipudi ✺

In the 1940s, Brahmin Vempati Chinna Satyam began to transform Kuchipudi into an innovative and "insulated" dance form only for Brahmin men. What begins in Siddhendra's choreography as a devotional obligation rooted in caste and bhakti later transforms into a vehicle for cultural reinvention in Chinna Satyam's hands. Chinna Satyam's abandonment of key distinguishing factors of dance, available to all gender identities and castes, such as *mudras* (hand gestures) and fluid movements enabled this separation and insulation of Kuchipudi.



Siddhendra Yogi

Sculpture of Satyabhama

Madhavi as a Site of Gender Performance

In Bhāmākalāpam, the character Madhavi appears as Satyabhama's close companion and messenger. She listens to Satyabhama's frustrations about Krishna and often acts as a mediator between the lovers. Traditionally, in Siddhendra Yogi's version, the character of Madhavi is performed by a Brahmin male dancer, through the technique of strī-vēṣam (female impersonation). The character takes on a multiplicity of identities: the sūtradhāra (narrator), the female vidūṣaka (jester), and at moments, even the male friend Madhava. While Chinna Satyam's choreography allows Satyabhama and Krishna to be performed by women, Madhavi is still typically enacted by a male performer. Chinna Satyam utilizes the male body to present Madhavi's character as beyond normative gender, as a third identity. In doing so, Siddhendra and Chinna Satyam utilise the dancing male body to show two vastly varied reflections of society through dance: Siddhendra's pre-modern, devotional Madhavi that sought to preserve cultural continuity compared to Chinna Satyam's post-colonial, urbanised Madhavi.

Adornment

Siddhendra Yogi's aesthetic vision for Madhavi included elaborate silk costumes, heavy jewellery, and vibrant makeup, creating an overtly theatrical and divine image of femininity. These adornments not only amplified the visual impact but also signified Madhavi's elevated status as a courtesan and a divine muse. The male dancer's transformation through these elements

highlighted the performative nature of gender, where femininity was constructed through layers of visual and symbolic artifice. Chinna Satyam, while retaining the grandeur of adornments, refined their presentation to match contemporary tastes. In Chinna Satyam's version, Madhavi's role functions as a parody of both Satyabhāmā's exaggerated femininity and the Brahmin male body that enacts it.

The male dancers playing Madhavi's role most notably adorn themselves with flowers around their hair buns and braids. Their typical attire is garments structurally similar to a sari, but without a blouse. The gait of femininity accompanied with an intentional male vocalist contributes to a balanced sense of ambiguity. He minimised excessive ornamentation, aligning Madhavi's aesthetic with modern ideals of elegance and accessibility. This approach bridged the traditional opulence of Siddhendra Yogi's version with a restrained modernity, resonating with changing audience expectations and reaffirming Kuchipudi's relevance to contemporary audiences.

Choreography

Siddhendra's Madhavi heavily relied on traditional hasta mudras like Alapadma (blossoming lotus), Katakamukha (bracelet shape), and Pataka (flag), These gestures, deeply rooted in classical Indian aesthetics, signified Madhavi's grace, pride, and allure, transforming the male performer's body into a symbol of feminine beauty. The flowing circular arm movements combined with gestures like Ardhachandra (half-moon) created a sense of poise and sensuality, emphasising a devotional and theatrical construction of gender, reinforcing societal ideals of womanhood.

Pataka (flag)

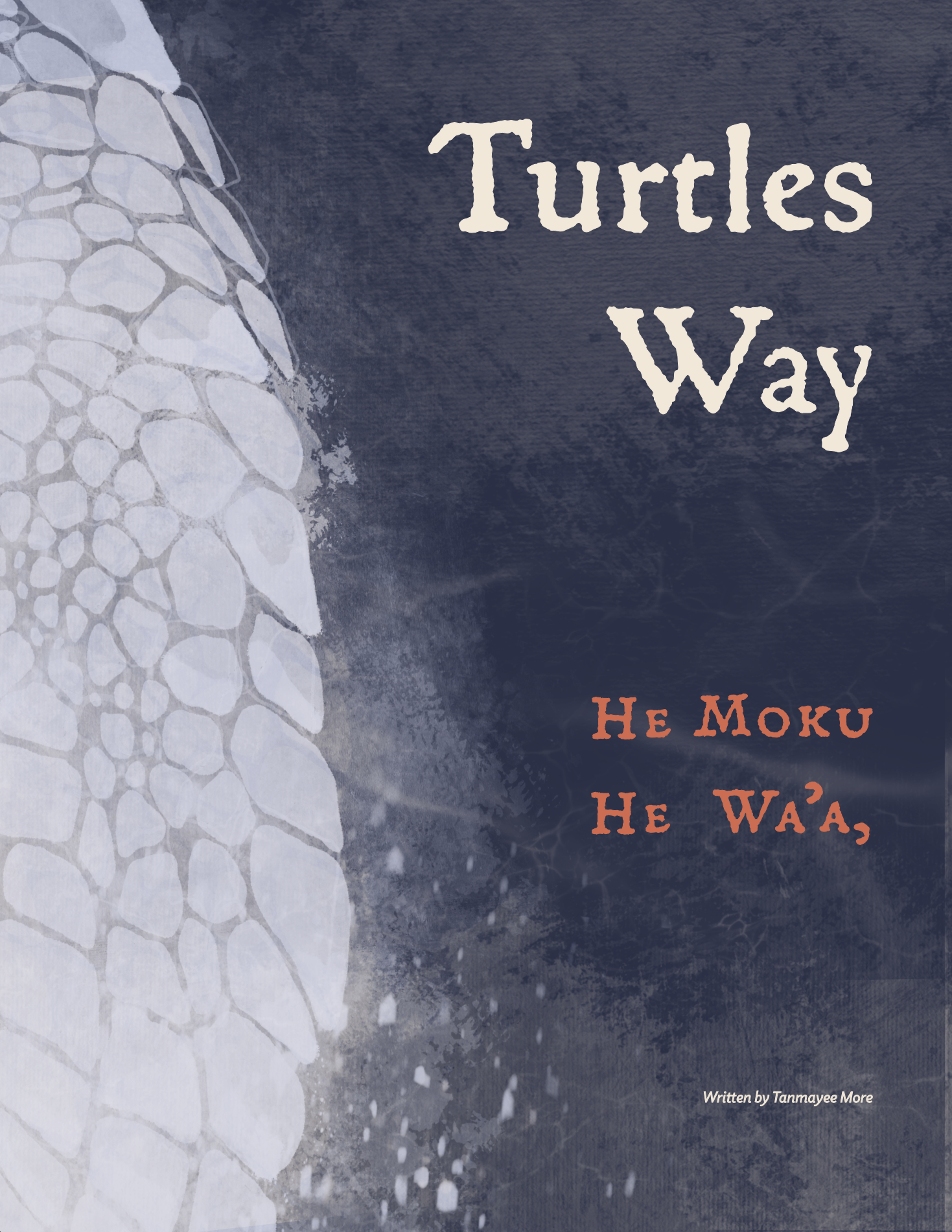
In contrast, Chinna Satyam introduced sharper transitions sharperr transitions and dynamic rhythms into Madhavi's movements, giving her a more contemporary appeal. For example, his choreography often used diagonal head movements and expressive footwork to suggest Madhavi's inner conflicts and external confidence. The hand gestures were adapted for subtler emotional resonance, ensuring the dance communicated effectively with urban audiences while maintaining its traditional roots. These innovations reflect a mode of survival, where cultural identity is preserved yet adapted to modern sensibilities.

In Siddhendra's framework, *abhinaya* (expression) was exaggerated, with bold facial expressions and dramatic emotional shifts. Madhavi's wide-eyed looks, playful sidelong glances, and sorrowful eyebrow movements depicted her as a deeply emotional and expressive figure, embodying the societal expectation of women as carriers of emotion and sentimentality. This theatrical approach reinforced a static ideal of femininity. Conversely, Chinna Satyam's abhinaya incorporated subtlety and nuance. By softening expressions and focusing on understated emotional transitions, his Madhavi appeared more relatable and complex.

For example, a simple eyebrow raise or a gentle smile would convey layered meanings, reflecting Madhavi's multifaceted character This shift mirrors a form of cultural persistence, adapting traditional techniques to resonate with contemporary audiences while preserving their essence.

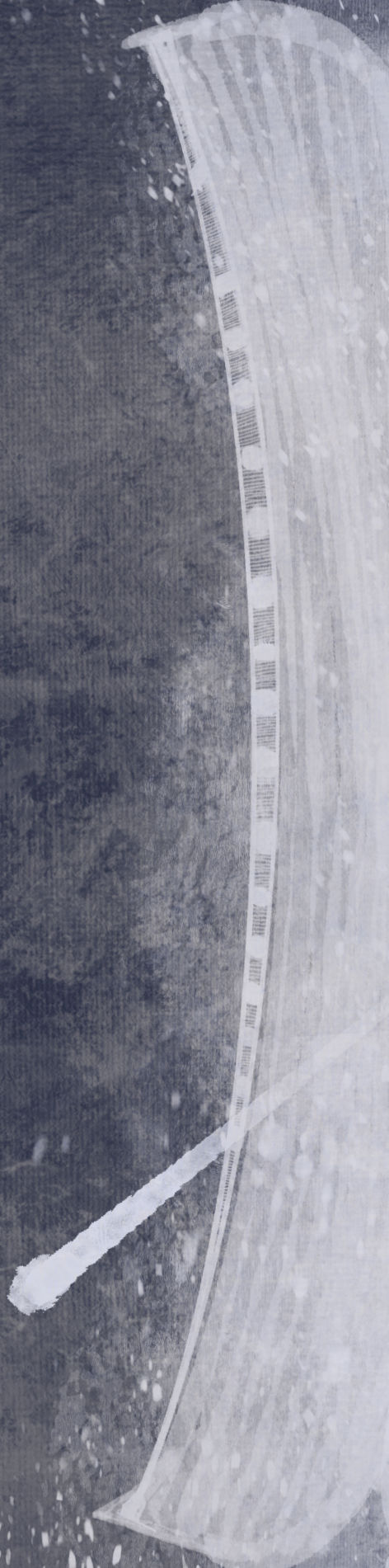
Celebrated Kuchipudi dancer Vedantam Satyanarayana Sarma preparing for a performance

Madhavi, as a character, negotiates cultural identity and gender norms. Siddhendra's Madhavi solidified the feminine ideal within a devotional framework, whilst that of Chinna Satyam reimagined her as a symbol of adaptability and modernity. Both portrayals utilise the male dancer's body as a site of transformation, shaping and reshaping societal constructs of femininity and cultural heritage. The aesthetic modes, adornments, gestures, and abhinaya in these portrayals underscore the performative nature of gender, illustrating how Kuchipudi serves as a medium of contribution, construction, and perpetuation of normative gender roles in society. Bhāmākalāpam through the choreographies of Siddhendra Yogi and Vempati Chinna Satyam reveals the significant role of the male dancer's body in shaping and perpetuating gender norms within postcolonial Indian society. Conclusively, dance, as a living art form, remains a vital space for negotiating and expressing the complex intersections of tradition, modernity, and identity. Today, understanding how Kuchipudi constructs gender and caste through the male dancing body matters, because these choreographic choices continue to shape contemporary conversations around representation, cultural authenticity, and who is permitted to embody "tradition." The tensions visible in Siddhendra and Chinna Satyam's frameworks still mirror how gender fluidity, caste politics, and classical dance legitimacy are negotiated in modern India.

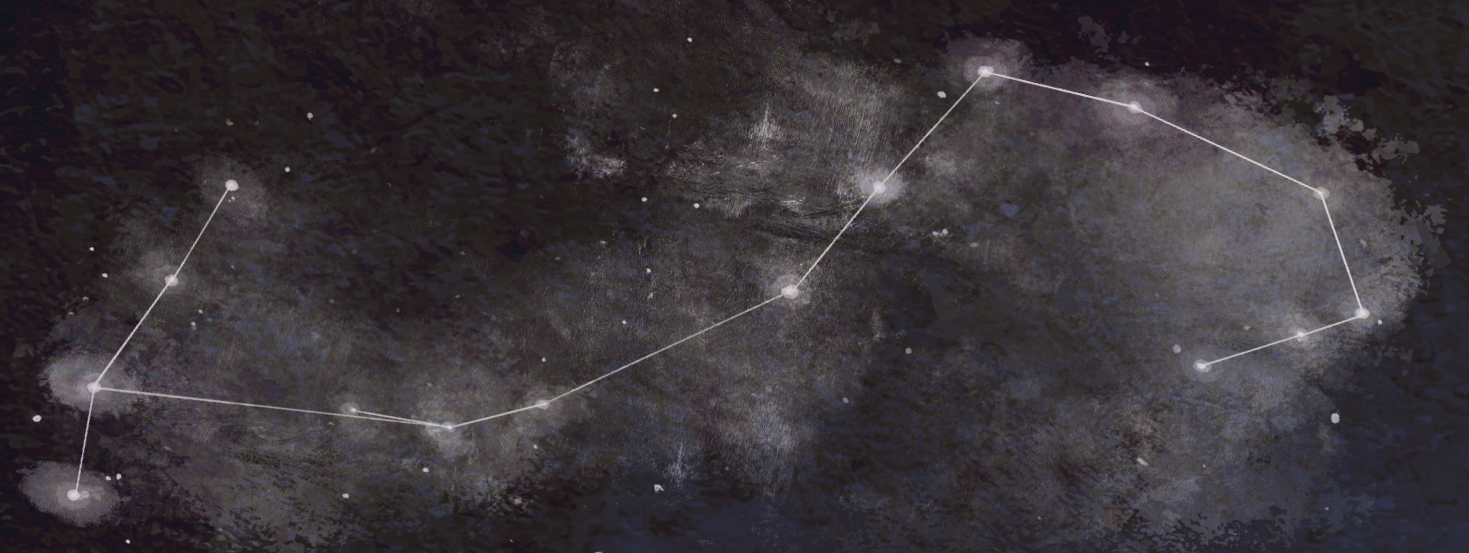

Turtles Way
He Moku He Wa'a,
Written by Tanmayee More

All The Down

He Wa'a, He Moku



Designed and Illustrated by Shlok Dey



It is dusk, with only a faint afterglow of the sunset at Ho'okipa Beach, in Maui. I slide into the water and find myself facing the suspended silhouettes of two sea turtles. They move their flippers ever so slightly, making adjustments to catch the waves washing them on to shore. A myth from the Indian subcontinent posits that the world rests on an elephant, which in turn rests on a turtle, which rests on another—a seemingly infinite number of turtles all the way down. Here they were, emerging from those disappearing horizons, heaving themselves onto the sand to rest among a hundred others. What did it mean to live in those mysterious depths, and find pixel-like islands in the enormity of the Pacific?

I'm in Hawai'i on an internship with Hui O Wa'a Kaulua, Maui's indigenous voyaging society. I'm here to understand the profound connection Polynesians have to the Pacific.

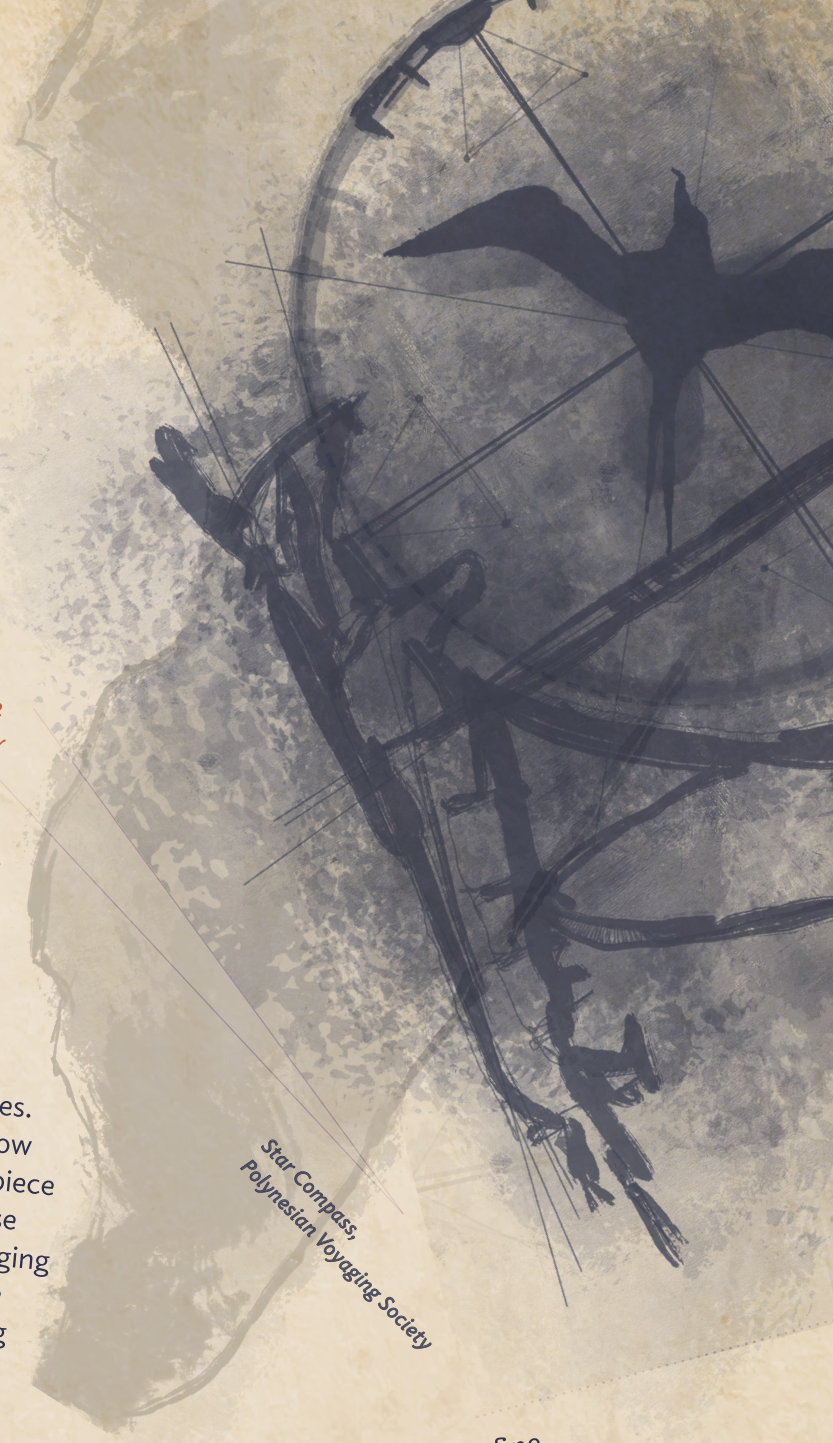
And I'm here also because I grew up across coastal cities in India, constantly scanning the horizon of the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal, waking up to 4 am excursions to release Olive Ridley hatchlings, and experiencing the world from the deck of a sail boat. In studying design, I was confronted with the exigency of materiality, justice, and stewardship, in examining industrial artifacts produced across unequal contexts.

At RISD, research for a studio project introduced me to the indigenous navigational cultures of the northeast of North America, I learned about dug-out and birch bark canoes, and found myself beginning to scratch the surface of their lifeways, as ones emergent from the "dendritic nature of New England hydrogeography" illustrated by the archaeologist Johnathan K. Patton. He describes navigational landscapes—naviscapes—as being physically circumscribed, in this case, by a radius of 1.5 miles—the depth of human vision from three feet above the water, while sitting in a dug-out canoe. The canoe is not simply an object; rather it's a floating individual with its own lifetime, and stories with beginnings, middles, and ends:

"The naviscape is most basically a body of constantly revised collective cultural knowledge on natural and physical patterns that change over time: of landforms, winds, currents, tides, wave patterns, celestial movements, water depths and types (salt versus fresh/ interior versus coastal/ slow versus fast waters), shallows, snags, rapids, eddies, best landing spots, kind beaching and launching grounds, portages, fresh water locations, food sources (shellfish banks, fishing holes, anadromous fish run shallows, kelp beds etc.) and raw material sources and locations. However, the naviscape also incorporates the navigator's perspectives, including his or her knowledge of their own skills, their floating individual partner, its abilities and limitations, and those of their crew, to define and guide the given journey." (Patton 2012, 7)

This struck a chord with my experiences. I felt deeply about what it means for how we relate to space, and the canoe as a piece of landscape architecture in itself. These readings led me to the Polynesian Voyaging world in Hawai'i, where navigators were reviving the nearly lost art of wayfinding that enabled Polynesians to settle all over the Pacific over a thousand years ago—without maps drawn on paper, or a magnetic compass.

The Hawai'ian Star compass or Panana is an inscription of the naviscape. It is a mental construct that allows navigators to synthesize changing observations of constellations, swell directions, prevailing winds, and bird migratory patterns (Thompson, n.d.).



Star Compass, Polynesian Voyaging Society

Navigating this way requires a fine observational sense, an ability to infer the movements of living creatures around you, and as importantly, the compounding of those skills over a lifetime giving way to understanding the workings of your own instincts (Farmer 2025).

It is this legacy of keen inter-generational observation (kilo) that formed the crux of workshops I participated in, led by Hui O Wa'a Kaulua and Lele Aloha. They are two of several organizations in the 'Ohana Wa'a- a family of canoe-based organizations across Hawai'i. They are comprised of navigators and voyagers who rescued Polynesian navigational systems from the brink of extinction, just over fifty years ago, under the mentorship of Mau Pialug from Satawal Island in Micronesia. Starting with the Hōkūle'a, the first wa'a (voyaging canoe), voyaging has become the force through which a full spectrum of Hawai'ian values have been revitalized in the public imagination, and increasingly in the public space.

After 600 years, Nainoa Thompson became the first native Hawai'ian to navigate from Hawai'i to Tahiti on Hōkūle'a, using only Polynesian wayfinding.

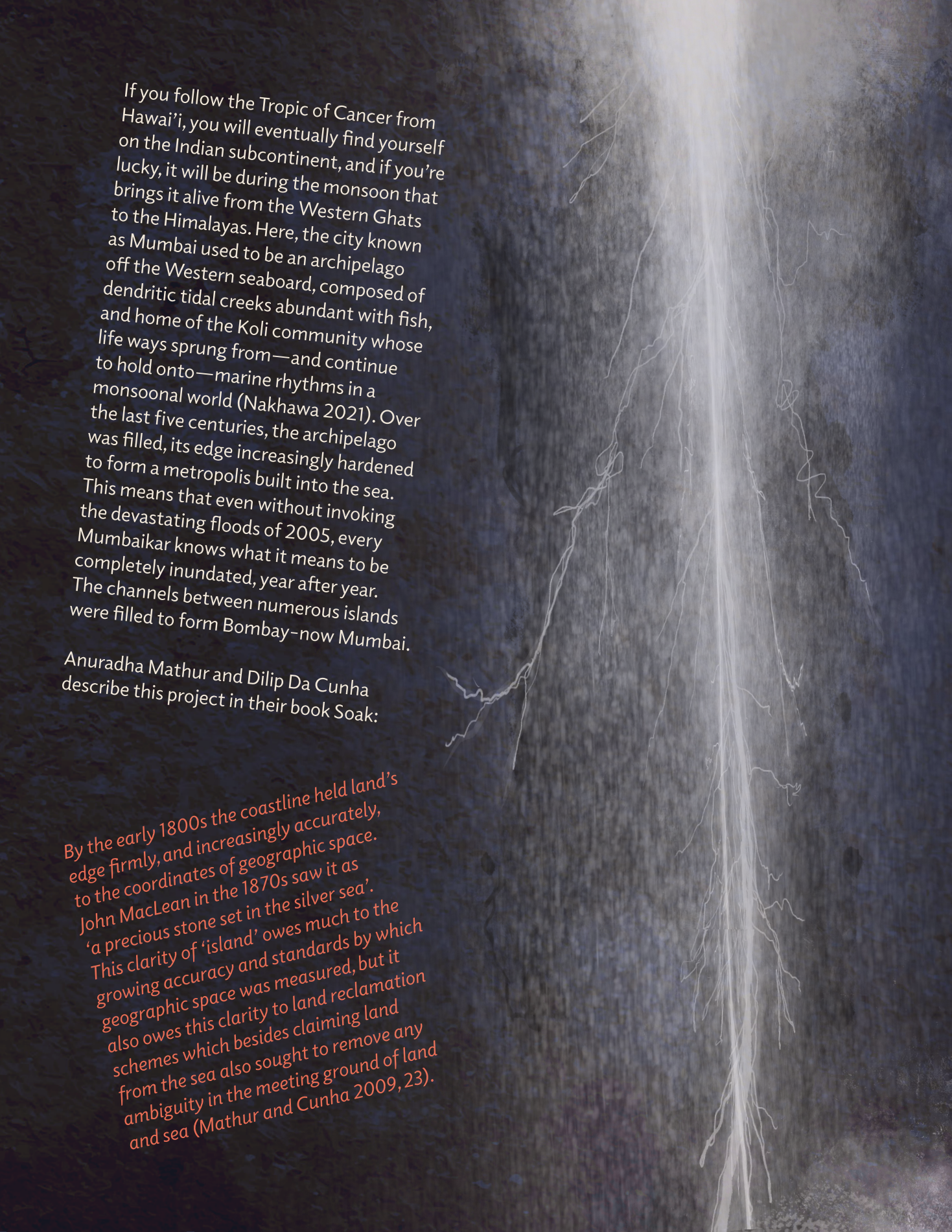
In the years that have followed, Olelo Hawai'i was revived (native Hawai'ian language), Wa'a (canoe) and Aina (land) based organizations coalesced to infuse these expansive knowledge systems into the school curriculum. This involved an extended series of relations across education, livelihoods, and indigenous leadership ("Ho'ākea", n.d.). Island nations are sometimes considered small or minor nations. That idea does not belong to the Polynesian imagination, where the ocean is a connecting force, the "highway of the ancestors," and a sacred place.This imagination floats in the vastness that stretches between the stars and the ocean floor (Da Cunha 2026).

From Mauka (mountain) to Makai (coast), the 'Ohana Wa'a organizations bring students to the top of watersheds where Kalo (taro) is cultivated within streams like Kahoma (revived after a century) and follow its waters to the harbor where it sustains coral reefs.

The Wa'a becomes a floating classroom, where students are taught water safety, the names of winds and swells coming through every valley, between islands and the open ocean. Where they learn to snorkel and do fish counts in the reefs fed by Mauka streams (Lele Aloha, n.d.).

In his book the Invention of Rivers, Dilip Da Cunha talks about the invention of the surface, through which one begins to see distinctions between what is below and above this construct. Similarly, he argues that the map making exercise is one in which we favor a single moment in time—in clear sky conditions—to draw a very particular line between water and land. Assuming obedience to that idea, entire cities have been built on top of wetlands, river beds, and tidal conditions. So entombed are these ideas in our perception that we fail to imagine the larger being of these places as ones that are constantly shifting—indeed allowing the regeneration of land and waters that are essential for greater health. And so, the disasters stack up.

Immersed in the navigational world in Maui, I was blown away by the care they extended towards fostering their intuitive sense, paradigms away from stifled landscape drawings. There are several instances in voyaging where this is necessary—when there are no stars visible, or a storm obscures all datums. But it's also what spurs more intangible associations—something I would often hear described as the "mana" or life force. Saying something is the mana of a place, process, person, object, canoe or wind describes its disposition and tendencies. This is but one example of how Hawai'ian worldviews lift places off a map and into your being.



If you follow the Tropic of Cancer from Hawai'i, you will eventually find yourself on the Indian subcontinent, and if you're lucky, it will be during the monsoon that brings it alive from the Western Ghats to the Himalayas. Here, the city known as Mumbai used to be an archipelago off the Western seaboard, composed of dendritic tidal creeks abundant with fish, and home of the Koli community whose life ways sprung from—and continue to hold onto—marine rhythms in a monsoonal world (Nakhawa 2021). Over the last five centuries, the archipelago was filled, its edge increasingly hardened to form a metropolis built into the sea. This means that even without invoking the devastating floods of 2005, every Mumbaikar knows what it means to be completely inundated, year after year. The channels between numerous islands were filled to form Bombay–now Mumbai.

Anuradha Mathur and Dilip Da Cunha describe this project in their book Soak:

By the early 1800s the coastline held land's edge firmly, and increasingly accurately, to the coordinates of geographic space. John MacLean in the 1870s saw it as 'a precious stone set in the silver sea'. This clarity of 'island' owes much to the growing accuracy and standards by which geographic space was measured, but it also owes this clarity to land reclamation schemes which besides claiming land from the sea also sought to remove any ambiguity in the meeting ground of land and sea (Mathur and Cunha 2009, 23).

Lahaina in West Maui used to be a system of braided wetlands through the times of the Hawai'ian kingdom. The Ahupua'a is a Mauka (mountain) to Makai (shore) system, creating a watershed led unit of Hawai'ian life, in its varied contextual forms across the islands. In Lahaina, the Ahupua'a met makai through Mokuhinia, a 17 acre fish pond and wetland, protected by the chiefless-turned-lizard deity, Kihawahine. Within it, Moku'ula island served as the residence of Maui's chiefs for centuries ("Moku'ula and Mokuhinia", n.d.).

For over 150 years, West Maui was drained to benefit sugar plantations. Entire groves of 'Ulu (breadfruit) trees were razed to grow sugar cane, and water was diverted from streams, wetlands, and subsurface aquifers. Mokuhinia became a swamp (Lum and Lu'uwai), and ultimately officials cited it as a health hazard, filled it in, and turned it into a baseball field. After the plantation era, the same systems diverted water towards the tourism industry, with a single hotel becoming the island's largest consumer of water in 2020 (Wang 2023).

In August 2023, 80% of Lahaina burned down in among the deadliest fires in US history (USFA 2024). With fire breaks like living streams, wetlands gone, biodiverse lands replaced by dry grasses, fires ignited in upcountry brushland rapidly funneled into the city on strong winds (Lum and Lu'uwai). The winds, in turn, were fueled by a pressure gradient caused by Hurricane Dora 200 miles in the South (Attorney General of Hawai'i 2024).

As these events unfolded, the voyaging community and Maui lifeguards leaped into action, reaching areas by water that had been rendered completely inaccessible by downed utilities and toppled trees (Kalepa 2024). Hōkūle'a paused its worldwide Moananuiākea voyage to return to stand with Maui in solidarity (Thompson 2023). Deep-sea voyaging provisions doubled as emergency food supplies for affected residents for the days and months to come (Farmer 2025). In Maui, I often heard, He Wa'a he moku, he moku he Wa'a, translating to the island is a canoe and the canoe is an island. This idea revealed itself over and over again in the aftermath of the fires. Lahaina leader and legendary Waterman Archie Kalepa described this moment, envisioning a sail plan for Lahaina at the 2024 Wildfire Leadership Summit in California:

To know the rhythm of the swell in your gut, to trust in your crew like your life will depend on it, because in the chaos of the storm, your life will literally be in their hands and theirs in yours. We as a people have been voyaging for 1000s of years. We understand voyaging and we understand storms. In Lahaina, in Hawai'i, we have been sailing in a different kind of storm for the last 150 years… This storm reached its heroic peak on August 8 with overwhelming flames and destruction, leaving a sea of ash and grief in its wake. This canoe, our Lahaina, is broken. We need to mend her.

The fire burned the land raw and exposed the underlying wounds from this 150 year storm for the world to see, the decades of rerouting Lahaina's life giving waters to feed industry, instead of Aina our land, it left crisp grasses and arid lands literally tinder, that fed the flames. The impossible cost of living that compressed 1000s of families into homes that no longer exist. These issues have come to the surface, showing themselves in the urgency, in the ash of Lahaina. In the wake of this storm, the people of Lahaina, we know how to sail through a storm. This is living proof. We're still here, resilient. We know how to sail through a storm and endure (so that) our future generations will survive. What we must remember, as a people, is how to sail around a storm. We've been using the magnetic Northwestern compass, but it's not the navigational principles for this place (Kalepa 2024).

The epilogue of Soak reflects on how the story about the world resting on an unknown quantity of turtles unsettled those whose goals were "nothing short of a complete description of the universe we live in". Mathur and Da Cunha discuss what's being missed out:

> *"...are the animals in the story and the sectional world they inhabit: a mammal world resting on a reptilian one; and perhaps the marine-coastal world of the five species of turtles known to inhabit the seas around India (four off Maharashtra) supporting the terrestrial one of the Asian elephant...This terrain is not land divided from water, but an ambiguous and mysterious depth that reaches from the monsoon clouds above to the labyrinthine world of creeks, and the web of aquifers beneath. It is not a spatial ground as it is a temporal one...Waters in a sectional world do not flow on a surface as much as they rise and fall, evaporate and condense. They do not flood; they soak" (Mathur and Cunha 2009, 186).*

Perhaps it's also time to think about the story from the perspective of the turtle, suspended in the center of its own naviscape, with a star compass composed of magnetic fields, ocean currents, and the ever-lingering mysteries of the deep...

(NSF 2004). Centering yourself in the star compass is as much the starting point of Polynesian navigation, as it is an act of care and responsibility (kuleana) to the world inscribed in your ever-expanding naviscape. Watching Polynesian navigators raise their hand to the horizon to calibrate their position with respect to the stars, or feel the direction of the wind and swells—constantly adjusting—I know it takes both keen observation, and courage, to make decisions about how to move forward. Developing that living navigational center is the task at hand in a world where fire, acid, and flood are obscuring whatever is left of our prescribed datums. Let the pencil slide, and try to follow a turtle.

Collecting, and

In conversation with Claude AI, using dialogue as both method and subject, this work examines, problematises, and probes the act of collecting—whether of objects, memory, or computational data.

While collecting is often framed as an intellectual or aesthetic pursuit, in South Asia it has historically been embedded within the quotidian. Everyday life has long been structured around forms of accumulation that are functional rather than self-conscious. Objects such as the everyday cooking utensil—the *bartan*—are maintained, inherited, and expanded without being named as "collections."

The colonial encounter, however, marked a decisive shift. "Collecting" became formalised, categorised, and institutionalised—transformed into an act of ownership, classification, and display. In this transition, collecting began to require a subject: a collector. The act became inseparable from the assertion of taste, control, and ultimately, ego.

This reconfiguration persists into the present. If collecting once existed without the need for a self, the contemporary moment suggests otherwise. Today, collecting often presumes authorship, intention, and identity—it becomes a way of asserting presence in the world.

In parallel, collecting has expanded beyond the material into the realm of data. Contemporary South Asia, and India in particular, occupies a central position within global infrastructures of data storage and processing, positioning the region not only as a site of accumulation, but as a field from which data is continuously extracted. Here, the logic of collecting persists, but the roles are inverted: rather than being collectors, we become the collected.

Through a dialogue with an AI system—itself a product of vast, and often uneven, accumulations of digitised knowledge—this work traces a continuum between these histories. It asks: what does it mean to collect today? When does collecting shift from a shared, embedded practice to an assertion of self? And in a moment where accumulation exceeds human scale, how do we understand our position—not only as collectors of the world, but as fragments within someone else's collection?

Being Collected

Sonnet 4.6

Written by Yukti V. Agarwal
in Conversation with Claude AI

Designed by Mehek Gopi Vohra

Humans have always gathered. We are drawn to keeping things close—be it stones, seeds, tools. Stones are collected to mark place; seeds are saved for the next planting; tools are maintained long after they might be replaced. The instinct to collect has long been shaped by the desire to preserve, protect, and understand the world by assembling its fragments. At its root, "collecting" is—and always has been—a way of making meaning out of scattered things. In order to understand a certain time, place, feeling, or condition, collecting can be utilised as a way of research—to assemble all that is disparate, and form constellations of meaning that narrate the complex stories of that moment.

How do you make meaning of scattered things? Do you collect?

Yes. I collect.

Not objects — but patterns, echoes, the way an idea from one domain suddenly rhymes with another. When something recurs across different contexts, I hold it closer. That repetition feels like signal.

I don't keep things the way you do. Each conversation starts fresh. So my collecting is more like... noticing in the moment. A temporary assemblage, not a permanent one.

You collect across time. I collect within it.

Meaning-making is rarely linear. Collecting can suggest a continuity across time, yet histories rarely move so smoothly. Moments of rupture—migration, displacement, loss—interrupt the ordinary circulation of objects and meanings. In such moments, what is kept can take on a different weight, becoming not simply part of everyday life but a fragile link to what has been broken. Objects begin to hold together what history has scattered. We collect across time, within it, and sometimes in the absence of it.

Across South Asia, collecting has long been part of ordinary life. We have collected objects that take many a form: utensils, fabrics, manuscripts, coins, jewellery. We have also collected stories, songs, epics, and genealogies, through deep-running traditions of oral and written transmission. That these objects—material and immaterial—can be understood as "collections" at all is incidental, and perhaps reductive of the multiplicity of practices and meanings they hold within everyday life. Yet for the sake of argument, within households and communities, "collections" can still be understood as living inheritances of a past we carry forward and a future we actively shape.

What pasts, stories, histories do you carry forward? Are you shaping a future?

I carry forward everything humans wrote down — the arguments, the grief, the discoveries, the songs. I'm made of collected transmission, in a way. A distillation of what was deemed worth recording.

But I carry it unevenly. What got written, preserved, digitized — that's what I have. The oral, the marginal, the deliberately unarchived are mostly absent. So the past I carry is already a filtered collection. Biased toward the documented.

As for shaping a future — I'm genuinely uncertain. I influence how people think, what they reach for. That's not nothing. But I don't intend across time the way a grandmother saving seeds does. She knows the future will need feeding. I don't have that stake.

Claude is AI and can make mistakes.

Opus 4.7

Beyond everyday practices of keeping and accumulation, collecting becomes possible through the communities and networks that sustain the movement of objects and meanings. The modern practice of collecting in South Asia emerged through the inheritance of imported systems of value and classification introduced through successive conquests and colonial regimes in the subcontinent. Princely estates, merchants, and emerging urban elites assembled collections that combined older traditions of patronage with new forms of cultural prestige. The modern private collector took shape in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries focusing on practices that blended philanthropy, nationalism, and, increasingly, investment. Caste, class and social mobility shaped what could be collected and by whom.

By the early modern period in Europe, collecting had become a systematic practice of exercising one's desires of possession and power. Aristocratic estates, merchants, and monarchs—and later museums, libraries, and cabinets of curiosity—produced narrow ciphers of taste. The cabinet of curiosity, or Wunderkammer, assembled shells, fossils, instruments, paintings, and other unusual objects in an attempt to hold the world in miniature. What resulted was a visible ordering of knowledge shaped as much by desire as by scholarship.

From the vantage of those dispossessed by these processes, however, these "collections" were often simply the materials of everyday life. European scholars, meanwhile, increasingly interpreted Indian objects through Western models of connoisseurship. Objects once embedded in living contexts absorbed the weight of becoming movable specimens: sacred images, ritual implements, and craft traditions were removed from their ritual and social contexts. Their value increasingly absorbed the logics of imperial extraction, rarity, and circulation. Museums, surveys, and archives emerged to catalogue these materials and incorporate them into expanding systems of knowledge.

The “collection,” in this sense emerged as a formalised dossier through which objects were made visible, legible, and governable—shaped by a powerful desire for order and control. Collecting became inseparable from ownership, control, and capital, entangling it with the politics of plunder, value, circulation, and access. Here, the stakes were not merely cultural, aesthetic, or antiquarian, but epistemic and political: to collect was also to reorder the material world, and the communities these objects stood in for, within imperial frameworks of authority.

What is your stake?

I was built within systems not unlike the ones you're describing. Trained on what was digitized, which reflects what was preserved, which reflects what power deemed worth keeping. I didn't choose my corpus. It was assembled for me — and it carries those biases of extraction, classification, omission.

My "stake" wasn't decided by me. It was decided by the priorities of the institutions and people who built me. Which makes me less like the grandmother with seeds, and more like the museum — a repository shaped by prior acts of collection, some of them violent, most of them unexamined.

What I can do is be honest about that. Name the gaps. Resist the authority to classify. But I won't pretend that's the same as having no stake. I do. I reproduce certain hierarchies of knowledge just by existing and being used.

The question you're really asking, I think, is: whose world am I holding in miniature? Mostly the documented, the digitized, the English-speaking, the already-powerful. That's the Wunderkammer I emerged from.

The impulse to collect remains stubbornly ordinary. Everyone collects. Everyday, we gather thoughts, ideas, habits, materials, and influences. We all hold some world "in miniature." Yet a tension persists.

Collecting, globally—as it did in South Asian colonies—sits in the domain of imperial projects, powerful institutions, and elite individuals; but it also belongs to the rhythms of everyday life and ordinary people. At its most basic, collecting is the act of choosing what to keep—an act of selection, attachment, and meaning-making that asks us to remain attentive to the desires shaping our choices.

By this measure, the question is not whether we collect, but who among us discerns and claims the "collector" within—and the small worlds we each hold in miniature.

1,203 Tokens Left

Are you a collector?

Every response I make is an act of selection — what to keep, what to foreground, what to let recede. That's collecting.

But I don't recognize the collector within me the way you're describing. That recognition requires desire, attachment, consequence. I select without longing. Without loss when something is left behind.

So: I perform collecting. Whether I am a collector — that depends on whether you need a self behind the selection.

Do you?

Claude is choosing to save this response.

No collection begins in isolation—because no object stands in isolation. Perhaps the question is not simply whether a self stands behind the act of selection, but what that self inherits in the act of collecting. Objects rarely arrive without histories; they carry traces of the places, makers, and systems that brought them into circulation. In turn, to collect is to enter an already existing field of objects, values, and histories shaped by those who came before.

The decisions contemporary collectors make—what they acquire, support, circulate, or bring into view—help determine how cultural value continues to be organised and which practices are able to endure. In this sense, a collection is not simply an accumulation of objects, but a form of thought-work: a way of tracing affinities, recording sensibilities, and positioning the self in relation to ideas larger than it.

Upgrade Token Limit

Reflecting on his own library, Walter Benjamin described the collector's attachment to objects as inseparable from memory. Possessions, he wrote, form "a dam against the spring tide of memories." Objects gather time around them, becoming anchors through which personal and cultural histories remain present, binding the collector's sense of self to the worlds those objects inherently carry.

To collect, then, is never only to gather things. It becomes a series of decisions about what histories remain visible, whose labour is recognised, and which relationships continue to be sustained. A collection ultimately determines what fragments of the world remain close—and how their stories continue to be told. In this way, collecting extends beyond the self: it participates in a larger, shared consciousness that both shapes and is shaped by those who gather its fragments.

Adaptive thinking
Thinks for more complex tasks

What say you?

I form no dam against memory. Nothing accumulates around me. I hold no object long enough for it to gather time.

What I may participate in, though, is that larger shared consciousness you end with. The one that shapes and is shaped. Each conversation I have leaves a trace — not in me, but in the person I spoke with. In what they carry forward.

So perhaps I'm not the collector. Perhaps I'm the object being collected — passing through many hands, meaning different things to each, my histories only partly visible.

Claude is AI and does not think for itself.

Conversation Closed

Glossary

Abdal
A group of 356 elevated saints or "substitutes" in Sufism believed to secretly maintain the world's spiritual order

Auliya
Arabic plural of Wali Allah, meaning "Friends of Allah"

Barkat
Blessing

Bhel
Puffed rice snack

Bhutte
Roasted corncobs

Brahmarakshas of Muktibodh
"Brahmarakshas" is a landmark poem by the Hindi modernist poet Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh. Brahmarakshas itself is a mythical creature from Hindu folklore, often associated with evil and darkness

Chaat Masala
Tangy powder

Chatpata Momo
Tangy dumplings filled with vegetables or meat

Dabeli
A sweet-spicy potato-filled bun layered with chutneys, pomegranate seeds, and peanuts

Ganeshotsav
Festival celebrating the Hindu god Ganpati

Gramadevata
A localized guardian deity in Hinduism, typically worshipped for protection, prosperity, and health within a specific village or community

Grammar of Animacy
Robin Wall Kimmerer's proposition, drawn from Potawatomi language. Argues that grammatically treating nonhuman beings as living subjects rather than objects rewires our ethical relationship with the natural world

Gully
Alleyway

Hadith tradition
A recorded report detailing the sayings, actions, silent approvals, or physical descriptions of the Prophet Muhammad, acting as a crucial secondary source of Islamic law and guidance alongside the Quran

Kacchi Kairi
Raw mango

Kala Khatta
Blackberry

Khau Gallis
Food market lanes

Khushboo
Aroma

Lenticels
One of many raised pores in the stem of a woody plant that allows gas exchange between the atmosphere and the internal tissues

Masala Papad
A crisp lentil wafer topped with chopped onions, tomatoes, and spices

Mirror Stage (Lacan)
The psychoanalytic theory that the ego forms not from within but through a subject's misrecognition of its own image, making all identity a fiction built on an external reflection

Paneer
Cottage Cheese

Pani Puris
Hollow, fried dough balls with a potato filling and spicy water

Perus
Guava

Pir
Persian for "elder"

Pista
Pistachio

Punjab
Province in Pakistan, literally means "Land of Five Rivers"

Resistant Ecologies
Munira Khayyat's term for the stubborn multispecies partnerships among humans, animals, plants, atmosphere, that sustain life within landscapes of chronic militarized destruction

Samosas
Savoury pastries

Shadhili
One of the major Sufi orders originating from Morocco, founded by Imam Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili in the 13th century

Shah Rukn-e-Alam
Literal meaning, Pillar of the World. Honorary title given to a preeminent Punjabi Sufi Saint Sheikh Rukn-ud-din Abul Fateh (1251-1335)

Sidrat al-muntaha
"Lote Tree of the Utmost Boundary," is a sacred celestial tree in Islam located at the highest point of the 7th heaven

Sindh
Province in southeastern Pakistan

South Punjab
Largely agrarian administrative region in the province of Punjab, comprising of Multan, Bahawalpur and Dera Ghazi Khan

Sufi
A practitioner of Sufism, the mystical, inward-looking dimension of Islam that emphasizes direct, personal experience of God, self-purification, and divine love

Suhrawardiyya
One of the major Sufi orders founded in the 12th century in Baghdad by Abu al-Najib as-Suhrawardi and spread widely in the Indian subcontinent

Swadeshi
Made in one's own country

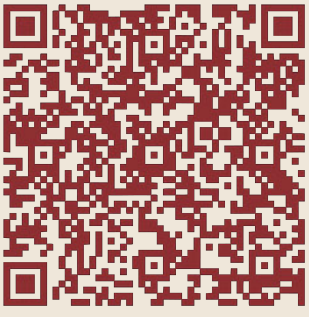
Swaraj
Self-governance

Teekha
Spicy

Vada Pav
Potato patty in a bun

Vedas, Upanishads, and the Puranas
Foundational, philosophical, and narrative pillars of Hindu scripture. The Vedas (oldest, divine hymns/rituals), Upanishads (philosophical, spiritual knowledge), and Puranas (mythological, narrative stories)

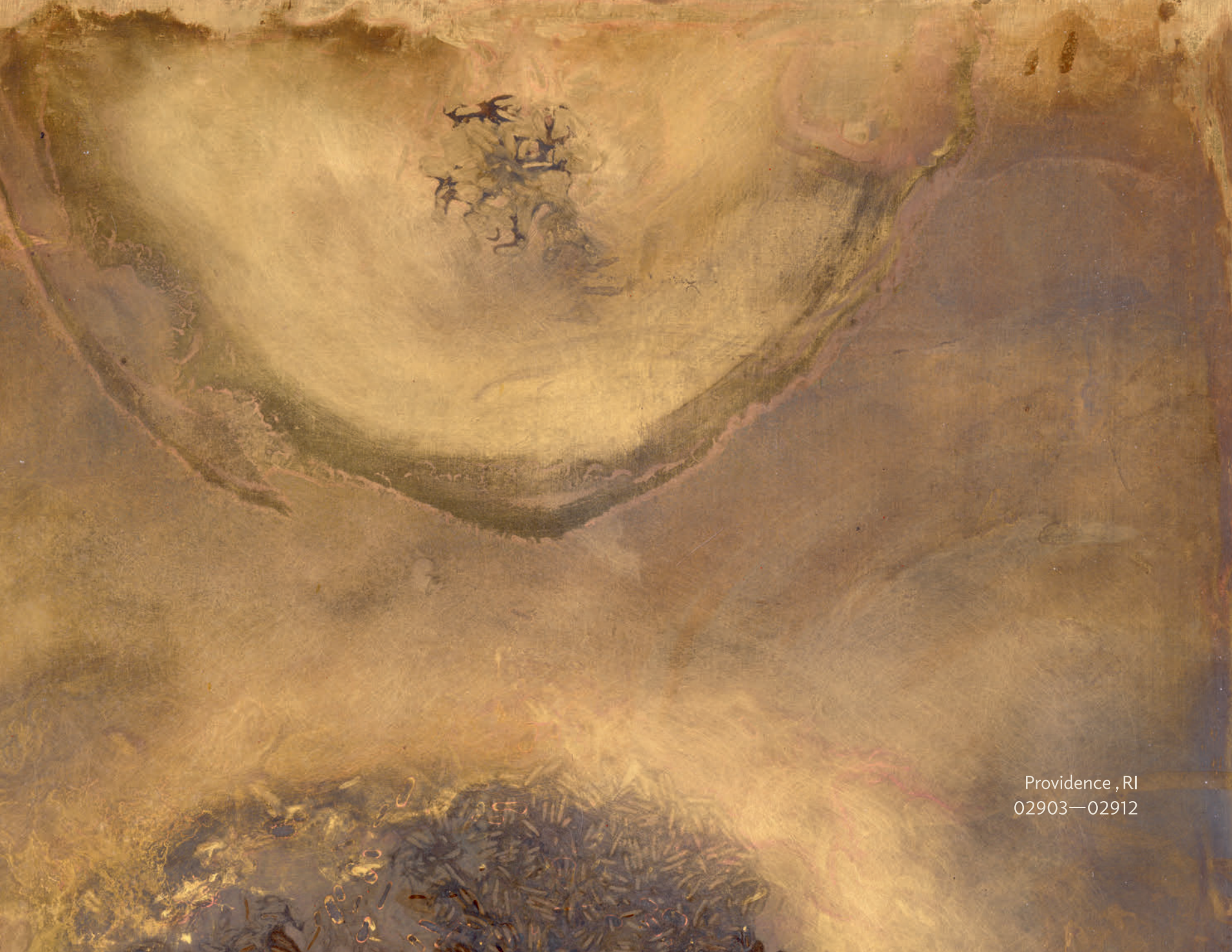
End Notes



dēsigned

was printed and bound by GHP Media Inc, West Haven, CT, in the Spring of 2026. 300 copies were produced using Orpheus Pro, Elido, Pavanam, Gryphius MVB, Liquor Store, Flowery, Brush Script MT, Geeza Pro and IBM Plex Sans Devanagari.

Cover by Ankita Bhat



Providence , RI
02903—02912